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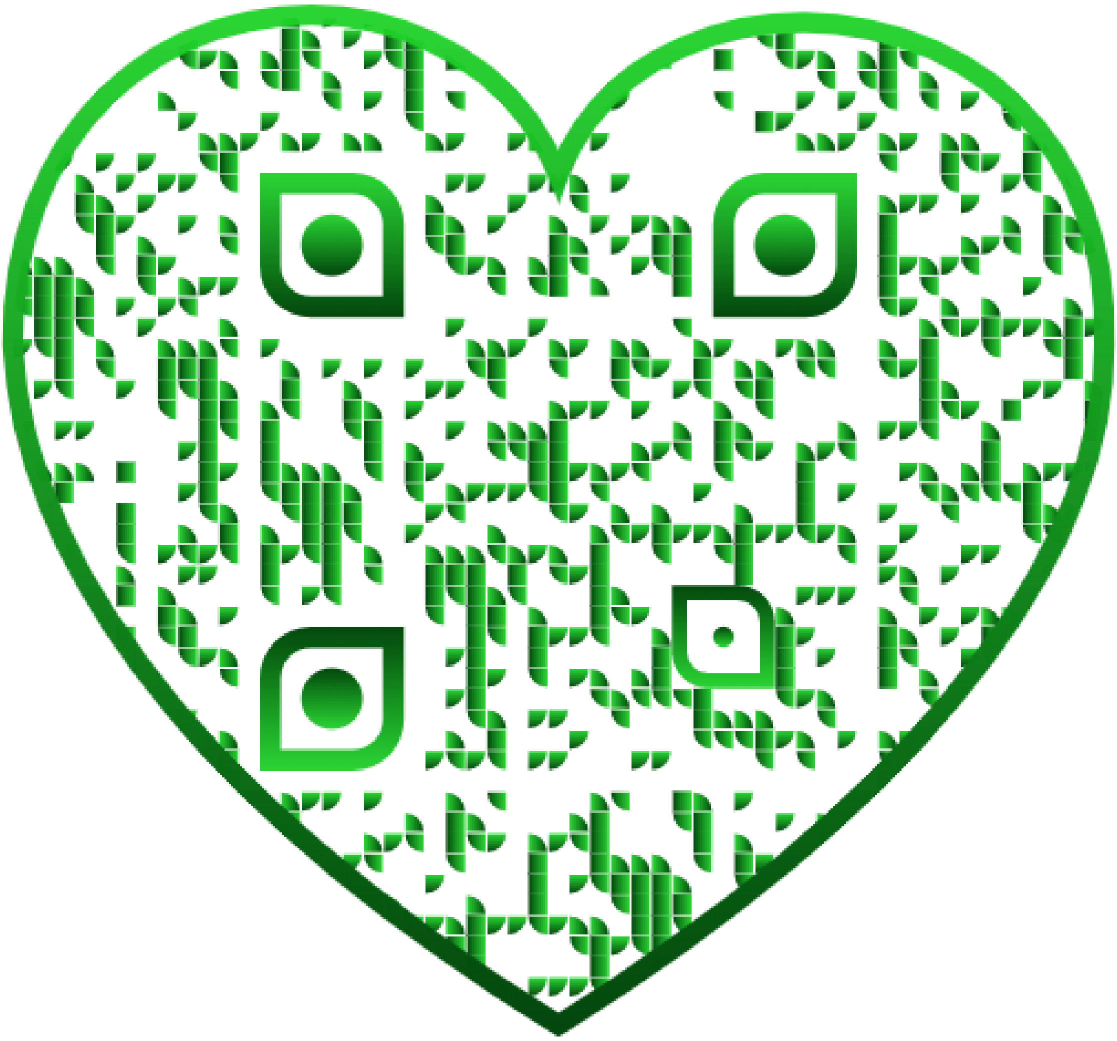

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COMMENT

WHY HAS GEELY'S TENURE OF LOTUS GONE SO WRONG?

Geely's entry into the Western market began positively. It was praised for how it handled Volvo's transition into a mainstream premium player during its first decade in charge. But that early success hasn't been replicated with its Western brands. Polestar is hugely loss-making and Volvo is undergoing painful cuts.

Geely's acquisition of an ailing Lotus began brightly. It built gradually, invested in Hethel and the Emira, and let the Lotus brand be resplendent in its sports car heritage.

But then it rushed through new EVs – developed and built in China – for an anticipated demand that has yet to materialise. That weakened the heart of Lotus and demoted Hethel.

Geely hasn't used its sizeable funds wisely, either. It brought in execs above those already there and opened lavish facilities, including London and Amsterdam offices. Meanwhile, its EVs are falling miles short of what are unachievable sales targets.

Since news of plans to close Hethel broke (see p10), there have been talks between the government, Geely and Lotus. Geely is adamant Lotus has a place at Hethel. Time will tell.

But Geely has managed it badly and might have caused the demise of one of UK automotive's most lauded locations.

Meanwhile, Geely is now planning the UK launch of its own brand (p16). It's safe to say not many will be sold in Norfolk.

Rachel Burgess, magazine editor
rachel.burgess@haymarket.com

Meanwhile, online...

autocar.co.uk

Automotive software gurus
Felix Page hosts a discussion about software-defined vehicles with some of the most influential engineers in the business.

Calling Japanese car fans
Join Alex Wolstenholme for a very brief history of JDM via the Toyota Corolla Levin, aka the AE86, a rear-drive hatch that loves to go sideways.

Ten years of the best cars
Only 21 cars have achieved a five-star rating in the Autocar road test since 2015. Find out which ones. Some may surprise you.

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"The Audi restaurant's serviettes feature cutaway diagrams and instructions for crucial culinary techniques" p74

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GOT A STORY Email our news editor
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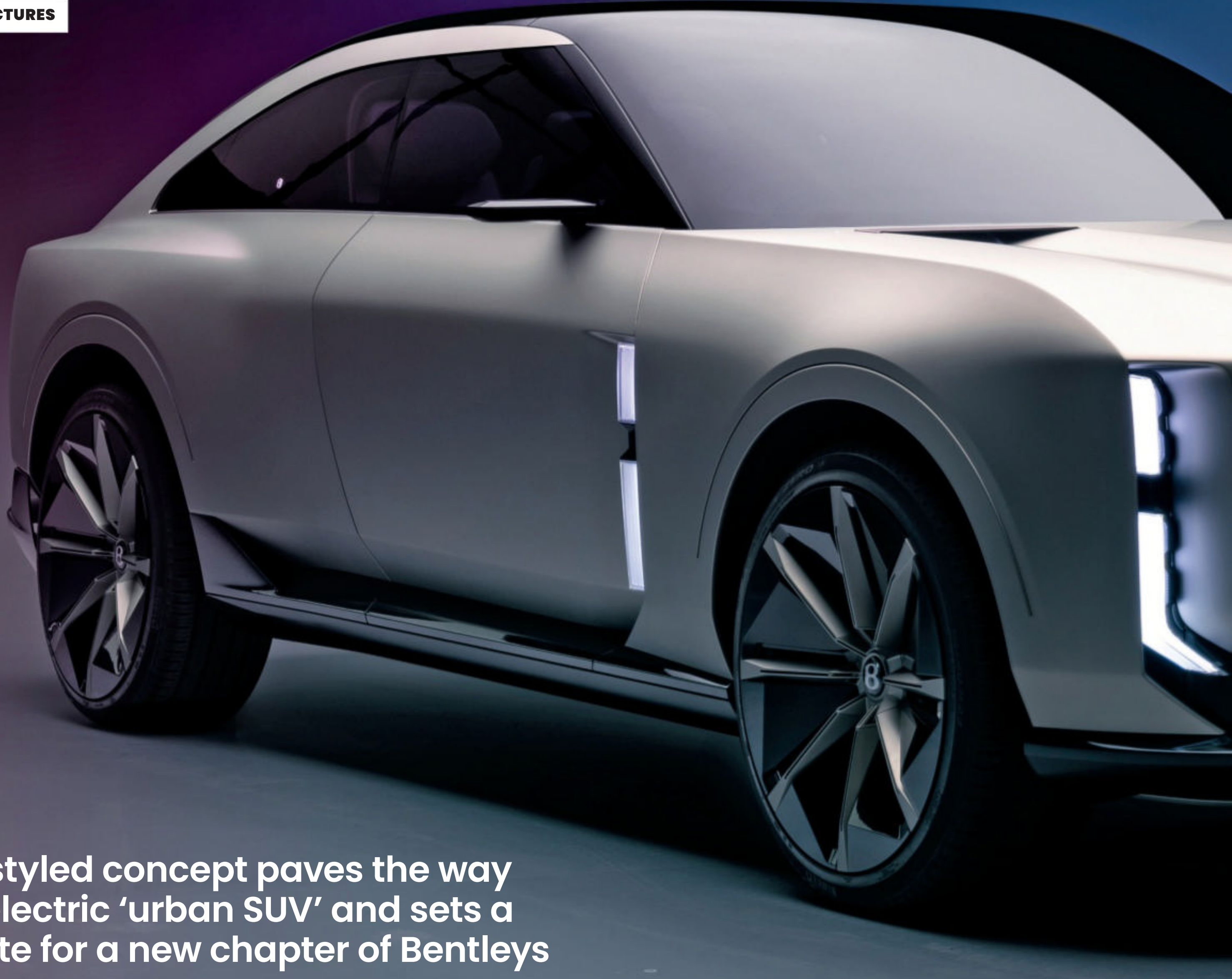
BENTLEY KICKS OFF NEW ERA WITH DRAMATIC RAISED LIMO

EXCLUSIVE PICTURES



Boldly styled concept paves the way for an electric 'urban SUV' and sets a template for a new chapter of Bentleys

Bentley has revealed a dramatic, high-riding limousine concept that previews the design of its upcoming cars – and it could evolve into a successor to the Mulsanne flagship.

Called the EXP 15, this 5.4m-long show car will inspire the shape and styling of the next generation of Bentley cars, beginning with its first EV, an 'urban SUV', which will be launched next year to sit underneath the Bentayga.

Straddling the boundaries between saloon, SUV and grand tourer, the EXP 15 takes design inspiration from some of Bentley's best-known historic models but ushers in a futuristic new treatment that departs radically from the current Continental GT, Flying Spur and Bentayga.

It's a statement of intent from recently appointed director of design Robin Page, who rejoined Bentley from Volvo in 2023, having previously served in Crewe's interior design team for 17 years.

He told Autocar that his aim with the EXP 15 is to drastically evolve the company's design hallmarks while remaining true to its most recognisable elements.

"It's still in that linear line of Bentleys, but it's a fresh start – a new design language," said Page. "The point is to make a bit of a bang: next chapter."

"It's also given us a chance to try a new, modern design language – more monolithic, stronger and cleaner in its surfaces and not too over-complicated," he continued, giving clues to the styling of Bentley's initial wave of electric cars.

"Luxury is about stripping things back to the core principles – clean surfaces, bold gravitas, monolithic forms, solidity – which I think Bentley needs."

NEW LOOK

The primary aim of the new concept is to showcase five overarching design themes that will define the next-generation Bentley line-up – all five of which are inspired by one of the earliest Bentley GT cars: the 1928 Speed Six with

Illuminated winged B sits above a "strong vertical" front end

Door-mounted, rear-facing cameras replace traditional wing mirrors

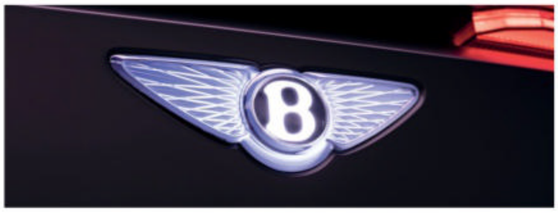
NEW BENTLEY BADGE REVEALED

The EXP 15 features a new version of Bentley's 'winged B' emblem that will be fixed to all of its future production cars – beginning with its debut EV next year.

The bottom set of feathers, which Page said are "quite soft" and likened to an owl's, have been removed in pursuit of "purifying and simplifying" the badge, and the main wings have a "sharper, more edgy wing profile" inspired by the peregrine falcon.

Page added that he took inspiration from luxury watches in refreshing the look of the central B element: "Instead of just a flat surface, it's got a glass piece and a three-dimensional 'jewel'."

He said it was important that the B can be used on its own, without the feathers attached, so that it is as clear as possible on digital platforms.



EXP 15 takes cues from this 1928 Speed Six, driven by Woolf Barnato

bodywork by coachbuilder Gurney Nutting.

Better known today as the Bentley 'Blue Train' for its association with original 'Bentley Boy' Woolf Barnato, who won a race against the legendary 'Train Bleu' express from Cannes to London in 1930 with a Speed Six, that car showcases various definitive styling cues that Page has reinterpreted for the modern era.

> **"It's in the line of Bentleys but it's a fresh start – a new design language"**

First is the "upright elegance" of its front end, which is referenced in the new concept's bluff, imposing face – a departure from the more angled visages of Bentley's current cars.

Page said: "We started to lean things back, but what we see from the heritage cars is this strong vertical element and that gives it that kind of proud confidence that we want to capture on the front of our cars. What we've been relating it to is a horse. If you think of a thoroughbred horse coming to a stop, it has that upright, vertical chest."

The more upright, monolithic face is at odds with the low-slung and heavily sculpted front ends that other firms are applying to their electric cars in pursuit of enhanced efficiency. But Page said Bentley is not out to claim any range records with its electric cars.

"We're finding that there's a sweet spot in terms of range. Our customers are basically telling us that 300-350 miles is that sweet spot. Beyond that, they'll use the private jet," he said.

The "endless bonnet line" is a key feature, too, and Page points to the slim, distinctively shaped daylight opening as one of the more obvious parallels between the old and new cars.

Meanwhile, the new-look rear end, with a prominent new light signature inspired by the firm's 'B' emblem, is described as the "prestigious shield" and modelled on the rear luggage carriers affixed to Bentleys of old.

The fifth design theme common to future Bentley models will be the "resting beast" proportions showcased by the EXP 15 – with a long bonnet (here housing a sizeable frunk with a pair of 1930s-style, piano-hinged lids), a cab-rear silhouette and heavily accentuated rear arches.

"We relate this to a tiger having a strong shoulder when it's laid down," said Page. "It's got power in the back legs."

Although the EXP 15 is a dramatic departure from the current conventions of Bentley design, its creators have preserved some of the firm's most important and recognisable features.

Page cites the grille-inspired front lighting ▸

EXCLUSIVE PICTURES

◀ design as a prime example: "We decided to keep the grille as being our main communication. In the past, the grille was all about getting air into the car. We don't need that any more, so we created a piece of art."

The concept's front end is dominated by a large section of cutaway diamond motifs, with a 'crystal'-themed LED light display behind, giving a dynamic effect that changes according to the angle they are viewed from. The EXP 15 also swaps from a traditional circular headlight design to a slimline vertical arrangement that references the chrome strips on the wings of the old Speed Six.

Page said round headlights are effectively a hangover from a time when lighting technology wouldn't allow for other shapes. "What we find is every time we did round lights, you get the retro signal. We just want to test the water to see how passionate people are about round lights," he said.

Page has sought to avoid an overtly retro-inspired design, despite taking influence from Bentley's past. "As soon as you start to duplicate," he said, "you fall into the retro trap."

He added: "What we're getting from our customers and dealers is that we need to be more modern and progressive. We love the old cars, but at the end of the day we want to be the coolest kid on the block."

FIRST-CLASS CABIN

Uniquely for a full-sized luxury car, the EXP 15 features a three-seat layout, with the nearside passenger seat sliding fore and aft electrically on demand, and rotating 90deg when the doors open for a more elegant exit – an arrangement that harks back to the cockpit of Barnato's famous continental cruiser.

"Barnato was a playful character: he liked to drive himself, but sometimes he wanted to have a whisky in the back. And he also had his girlfriend with him, and sometimes she would sit in the back. It was a very self-indulgent car," said Page.

The concept also has picnic seats and a champagne cooler in the tailgate, a reverse-opening rear door on the passenger side and a central section of the roof that opens when parked so passengers can stand before getting out. Bentley has even designed a bespoke dog carrier that mounts in the passenger footwell.

"What we're finding is that people love this idea of real luxury," said Page, "and the dog is now a very important accessory."

He said the aim with the EXP 15's cabin is to ensure VIP passengers have the most dramatic entrance possible upon arrival at a prestigious destination.

"The idea is that the most important person sits in the rear, and when they arrive at an occasion, the two doors open, the seat twists around, the roof goes back and you get 'the art of arriving'. That is the Instagram photo shot – someone arriving in style and that's what we wanted to capture," said Page.

Traditionally, outlandish features such as these remain the preserve of concept cars as designs progress through to production, but Page said "we've based it all around a viable package" in order to "gauge whether this is an interesting concept".

Meanwhile, in the centre of the dashboard, where a large touchscreen is usually mounted, there is a prominent physical dial to control various in-car functions, with a small digital display housed within it that can show the state of charge or directional arrows for the sat-nav, among other functions.

"It's like having a mechanical watch and a digital watch," said Page, adding that Bentley is exploring new dashboard formats that aren't centred around a traditional touchscreen, and emphasising its focus on analogue controls, which feature throughout the cockpit of the EXP 15.

"What we're finding, especially at our end of the market, is that people are a bit bored with full-digital screens. What makes us premium is to keep a good level of mechanical detailing that the others can't do," said Page.

New, more monolithic approach to surfacing is evident in its side profile

ERA-DEFINING BENTLEY CONCEPT CARS

1999 HUNAUDIERES
Sixteen-cylinder supercar introduced key styling elements and hinted at Bentley's dynamic reinvention.

2012 EXP 9 F
Broke the taboo that was a Bentley SUV, laying the foundations for the roaring success that the Bentayga became.

2015 EXP 10 SPEED 6
This vision of the Conti GT's future promised hybrid power and a top speed of 200mph – and the production car delivered.

2019 EXP 100 GT
Bentley looked ahead to 2035 with a 1340bhp, quad-motor EV touting the option of hydrogen fuel cells.

“What we’re getting from customers is that we need to be more modern and progressive”

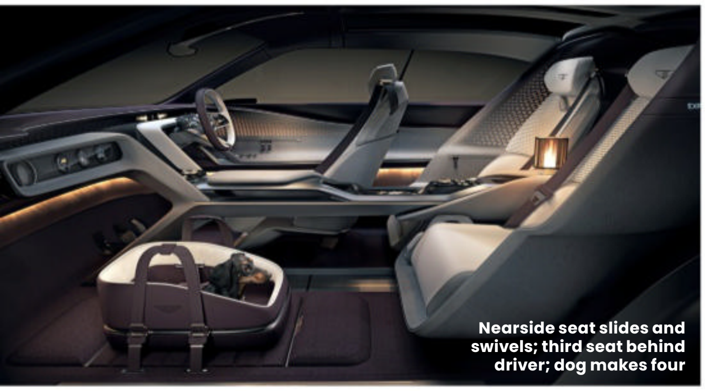
Q&A ROBIN PAGE, DIRECTOR OF DESIGN, BENTLEY

Have Chinese customers driven your focus on rear-seat comfort?
“We’re very successful with sedans in China – they love Flying Spur – so that’s definitely one area to connect with. The other thing is that our customers are changing. Even in the US, what’s important to them is how they arrive at the destination. This art of arrival is something that’s key at the premium level. They go to very exclusive events in order to arrive and be seen.”

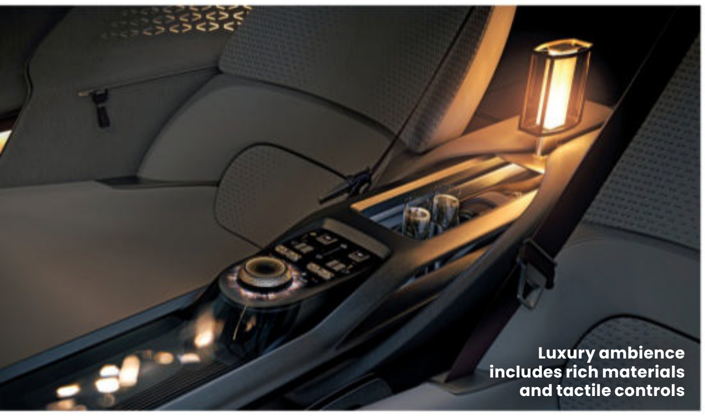
So is there less of a focus on driver engagement?
“The 3 Litre is a car Woolf Barnato drove himself, but there was a need for him to have a drink in the back and a sideways seat. And that’s typical of our customers: they will drive the cars themselves. That’s the difference. Our customers love to drive, but there are occasions where they either want to impress someone and hence give them a really nice experience, or they want to arrive themselves at an event and be chauffeured – so it needs to do both.”

How will you balance physical and digital controls?
“For us, it’s a blend of the two together. We want people to be delighted by the physical and hidden details. But we still can’t just take out digital experiences, because they’re so amazing in terms of content and animations. You want to scroll through your music selection. You want to have the latest navigation system… And that’s a digital experience. But what we do is combine these two.”

Robin Page (left) wants Bentleys to have a more upright face



Nearside seat slides and swivels; third seat behind driver; dog makes four



Luxury ambience includes rich materials and tactile controls

WILL THEY BUILD IT?

The EXP 15 was conceived first and foremost as a design showcase, but Page suggested that a positive reception to its genre-bending silhouette would strengthen the likelihood of a production version.

Asked if the EXP 15 could be readied for showrooms, he said: “It’s doable.”

The concept has been designed around “a viable package and platform, and these are mechanisms that exist. What we want to do is gauge whether this is an interesting concept,” said Page.

He stopped short of saying whether the EXP 15 had been conceived around a specific architecture, but a variation of the SSP ‘Sport’ platform that sibling company Porsche is using for its new upcoming SUV flagship, the K1 – a large, three-row SUV that will sit above the Cayenne – would be a logical fit for a production version.

If it does make showrooms, the EXP 15 would not replace any current model, but rather it would pick up where the Mulsanne limousine left off when it was retired in 2020 after a 10-year run – once again giving the Crewe firm a direct rival to the Rolls-Royce Phantom.

Before giving the green light, though, Bentley will closely monitor reaction to the EXP 15 concept in order to gauge the viability of offering a high-riding saloon in this vein.

Page said: “We know really well the GT market. We pretty much invented that market. That’s solid. We know our customers. We know what we want to do. Even in the luxury SUV market, we’re now pretty experienced.

“The one we’re curious about is the sedan… We’ve got a very successful Flying Spur. The question is: do we continue with that kind of proportioned car, or do we elevate it a bit more?”

There are no plans to dramatically reinvent the Continental GT (“people love it for that really amazing driving experience”) or the Bentayga (“its capability as an SUV is incredible”) in this vein. But Page said the market for luxury saloons is changing and the EXP 15’s unique shape could be the key to renewed success in that market.

“What we’re exploring here is: there is the traditional sedan, but is there something else out there?” he said. “People are starting all the time to want a more elevated seating position, and if you look at the trends, the SUV is constantly, always growing, and the sedan one is steady. So we’re just exploring if that’s an area that we’ve not tapped into.”

FELIX PAGE

VANTAGE S BACK AS 671BHP TRACK-HONED WEAPON

Aston focuses on track performance for most potent series-production Vantage yet, with 590lb ft twin-turbo V8 and 0-60mph in 3.3sec

Aston Martin has revealed the Vantage S, the third-generation sports car's most track-focused incarnation to date.

It is the first time the S suffix has adorned a Vantage since 2018, and the new model follows the recently revealed DBX S as Aston brings back the badge for its highest-performing models.

While the 671bhp Vantage S is the most powerful series-production version of Aston's entry-level sports car yet (disregarding the extremely limited V12 Vantage of 2022), attention has been focused specifically on making it as quick as possible on track.

To that end, engineers have worked to increase cornering speed and stability. Key to this is the fitment of a new ducktail spoiler, which has been tuned to push the overall downforce balance towards the front of the car. This is combined with new front and underbody aero to produce 111kg of downforce at top speed.

Alongside this, Aston has reworked the 4.0-litre twin-turbocharged V8 to deliver 671bhp while making the unchanged 590lb ft accessible higher up the rev range, where it is now produced between 3000rpm and 6000rpm.

The car's power delivery software has also been modified, with the drive-by-wire throttle tuned to be more responsive and allow for better feel.

Combined, this delivers a launch control-enabled 0-60mph time of 3.3sec (0.1sec quicker than before) and a 0-124mph time of 10.1sec. Top speed is unchanged at 202mph.

While the car is 15bhp more powerful than before, that 0-124mph time is more than a second slower than that of Ferrari's 631bhp Amalfi, the Italian car maker's new entry-level, Vantage-rivalling replacement for the Roma.

Vast aero additions aside, the Vantage S is marked out by S badging inside and out, special satin black 21in alloy wheels and new blade-shaped front air intakes.

Pricing for the new Vantage S is estimated to start at £170,000. Deliveries will begin in October.

WILL RIMELL

ALPINE RETURNS TO RALLY ROOTS WITH HOT A290

ALPINE HAS LIFTED the covers off a rally-ready version of its Renault 5-based A290 electric hot hatch.

Priced from €59,990 (£62,400 including VAT), the A290 Rallye is a pure-competition variant of the electric hatch that has been extensively modified, with a stripped-out interior, a roll-cage and bucket seats among the changes.

It is also fitted with a limited-slip differential for a better distribution of its 217bhp and 221lb ft between its front wheels.

Alongside new brake discs (350mm in diameter at the front, 280mm at the rear), the A290 Rallye gets race-spec ALP Racing Suspension dampers and 18in Evo Corse wheels wearing Michelin Pilot Sport A tyres.

Other modifications include an exterior speaker (to provide rally spectators with a synthesised sound) and a hydraulic handbrake for negotiating tight bends.

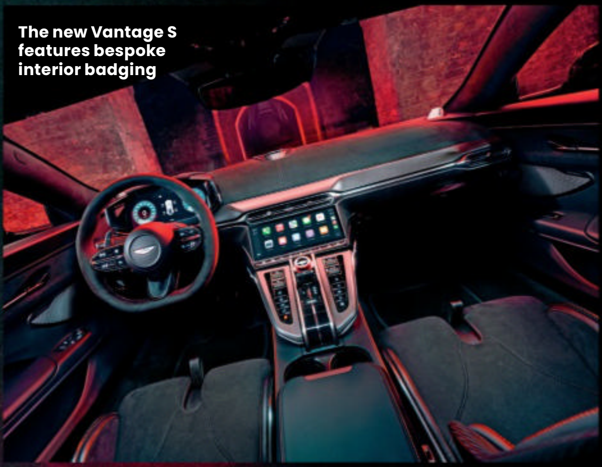
Rally-spec A290 gets upgraded brakes and a limited-slip differential

ALPINE
A290 RALLYE

OFFICIAL PICTURES

New aero at the front and underneath contributes to 111kg of downforce

Revised rear lip has been tuned to shift the aero balance forwards



The new Vantage S features bespoke interior badging

	 ASTON MARTIN VANTAGE S	 **FERRARI AMALFI**
Price	£170,000 (est)	€240,000 (£204,700)
Engine	V8, 3892cc, twin-turbocharged, petrol	V8, 3855cc, twin-turbocharged, petrol
Power	671bhp	631bhp
Torque	590lb ft	561lb ft
0-62mph	3.4sec	3.3sec
0-124mph	10.1sec	9.0sec
Top speed	202mph	201mph

DELTA HF INTEGRALE REVIVED AS HOT EV

Lancia will launch a new Delta HF Integrale next year, more than 30 years since production of the legendary hot hatch (pictured) ended. Lancia said the Integrale name will also adorn its top performance models, starting from 2026.

The Delta HF Integrale is likely to adopt Stellantis's 278bhp electric powertrain and e-CMP EV platform, as used by the group's other warmed-up models, such as the Lancia Ypsilon HF. It includes a mechanical limited-slip differential, hydraulic bump stops and a rear anti-roll bar.

AUTOCAR IMAGE

EURO BUILD FOR POLESTAR 7

Polestar will start building its upcoming compact SUV, the 7, in 2028, with production taking place at sibling firm Volvo's new Slovakia factory.

The two companies have signed a memorandum of understanding for Volvo's third European plant – currently under construction in Kosice – to manufacture the electric Range Rover Evoque rival. It will be the brand's first car built in Europe.

Polestar has confirmed the SPA3-based 7 will use a "technology base" from Volvo, which will mean it benefits "from group component sharing, cell-to-body technology and the next generation of in-house-developed e-motors".

DOES LOTUS STILL HAVE A FUTURE IN THE UK OR NOT?

After contradictory messages emerged recently, we take a closer look

Uncertainty surrounds the future of Lotus in the UK, with conflicting reports, statements and sources suggesting that the sports car maker is preparing to close its long-standing Hethel base and move production to the US.

That heart-stopping news broke early in the morning of 27 June, when a source with impeccable connections to Lotus UK told Autocar that the order had come from China to prepare its historic manufacturing facility in Hethel for closure. A second source backed up that bombshell, claiming Lotus was investigating moving sports car production to the US.

Separately, further reports from a different source confirmed that Hethel was indeed on the chopping block, threatening the 1300 jobs there.

By the following day, however, Lotus issued a statement that "there are no plans to close the factory", pointing out that the UK was "the heart of the Lotus brand". On 29 June, secretary of state for business and trade Jonathan Reynolds met with Lotus to receive assurances that the plant would be safe.

Relief that Lotus wouldn't close its facility after almost 70 years was underpinned by a feeling of unease. What just happened? Was Hethel really under threat?

Lotus was certainly keen to move production to the US, as had been confirmed by CEO Feng Qingfeng on the company's earnings call just two days earlier.

The statement from Lotus, while clear that there was to be no shutdown, also left some room for manoeuvre. "We are actively exploring strategic options to enhance efficiency and ensure global competitiveness in the evolving market," it stated.

The phrase 'evolving market' is a mild way of saying that Lotus has been hit hard by slower than expected demand for luxury EVs. Since Geely bought a majority stake in Lotus in 2017, the Chinese giant has bet heavily that it could leverage the marque's storied past to create a sporting luxury brand.

More than $2 billion (£1.5bn) of investment later – including a new factory in Wuhan, China, with a capacity of 150,000 and a £100 million makeover of Hethel – Lotus has yet to see a return on that investment.

According to its stock market prospectus published in 2023, 2025 was the year it was scheduled to make its first profit. Instead, the company posted a net loss of $183m (£135m) for the first quarter of this year while debts increased to $3.3bn (£2.4bn).

"They took a big punt on premium luxury electric cars and no one's buying them," according to one former executive.

Lotus wasn't alone in thinking that electricity was to be the default fuel for cars. The rise of Tesla, and particularly the way electric fever juiced its stock price, persuaded many seasoned executives to push hard with EVs.

Aston Martin, for example, was about to bet the farm on an electric revival of the Lagonda nameplate before the Covid shock and a change of ownership ended that dream. The brand now says its first EV will arrive "before 2030".

Feng identified one problem: EVs didn't offer target customers anything new, unlike in the lower

MORE POKE FOR CARRERA 4S

Porsche has updated the 911 Carrera 4S, giving it 473bhp. The extra 30bhp over the previous iteration comes courtesy of an intercooler borrowed from the more potent 911 Turbo. Prices start at £127,000.

MULTIVAN GETS 4x4 OPTION

The Volkswagen Multivan is now offered with four-wheel drive. The option comes as part of a new 242bhp plug-in hybrid powertrain using a 1.5-litre four-pot and two electric motors, priced from £54,525.

segments. "Luxury car engines are already very powerful and the driving experience is quite similar," he told The Wall Street Journal last year.

The scale of the plan was beyond ambitious. The 2023 share prospectus forecast Lotus selling 47,000 cars last year, split between 29,500 units of the Eletre electric SUV, 11,500 units of the Emeya electric saloon and approximately 6000 sports cars. In the event, only the Hethel-built Emira came anywhere close, with sales of 5272. Overall, Lotus sold just 12,065 vehicles in 2024.

This year, Lotus's plan was to sell 73,000 cars, halfway to the ultimate goal of 150,000 by 2028. Instead, deliveries have actually fallen 42% to 1274 in the first quarter, with the Eletre and Emeya down 31% to just 719. Worse, sales even fell in China.

Lotus said the fall was down to a "scheduled transition period" before sales of upgraded models started in the second quarter. However, the brand has been hurt badly by unforeseen tariffs in the key target market of the US. A 100% tariff on China-built EVs forced the company to pull the Eletre, leaving just the Emira ICE sports car.

Meanwhile, production of the Emira at Hethel has been paused since mid-May while the UK successfully negotiated a drop in the 25% global tariff on cars imported to the US imposed in April to 10%. "It's been a turbulent start of the year," Lotus Europe CEO Matt Windle told Autocar in May.

The upheaval has played havoc with Lotus's finances. Geely put another $119m (£88m) into the company in June, but cost-saving has become a priority. The company announced it would cut 270 jobs at Hethel and has recently moved sales and marketing staff out of its just-opened central London office.

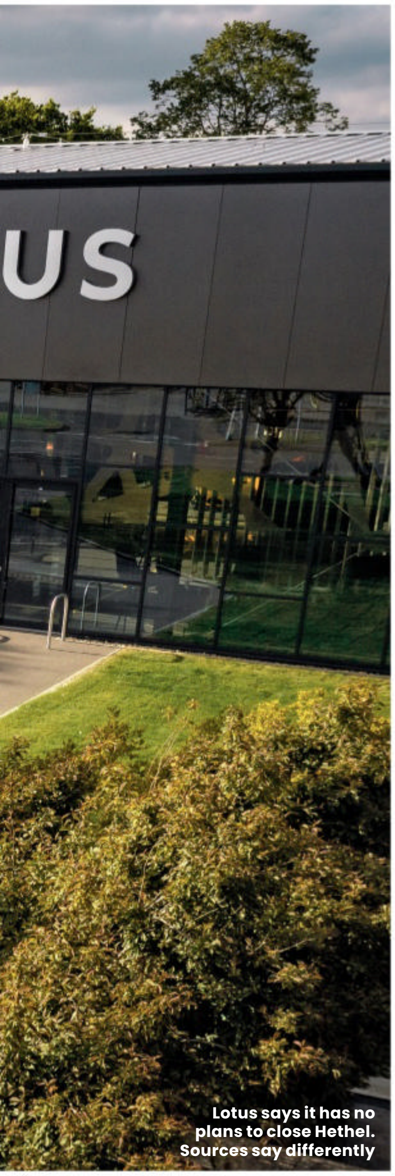
Emira sales have been strong but demand for Hethel's other model, the £2m electric Evija hypercar, has reached only a "handful" instead of the 150 planned, according to one source, which is depriving the factory of a key planned revenue stream.

Windle wants Hethel to build other models, a strategy that might save the plant if Emira production really does go to the US. "Back to the late 1990s and 2000s, we were building several models at Hethel [including the Vauxhall VX220 and the Tesla Roadster] and I think that's a business model we're exploring," he said in May. The upcoming Polestar 6 electric roadster is one possibility, he suggested.

Lotus is in dire straits but the company is still pressing on. The electric strategy has been modified to include plug-in hybrids, with the Eletre gaining the 'Hyper Hybrid' drivetrain early next year. Sports cars are also included in the PHEV plan, Feng said on the company's earnings call. The revised future model plan includes a facelift for the Emira in 2027 as well as a new model arriving in the same year, potentially the 'Type 134' electric rival to the Porsche Macan – a car forecast by Lotus in 2023 to be selling 70,000-80,000 units by 2027.

A more affordable car with a more globally appealing drivetrain might not generate the margins of the Eletre or Emeya models but it could yet become the catalyst to match Lotus's rampant ambition and high quality levels with an audience willing to take a punt on a newcomer.

NICK GIBBS



Lotus says it has no plans to close Hethel. Sources say differently

Deliveries of Eletre and Emeya fell to 719 units in the first quarter of 2025

VP4 11
VP4 09

Hethel factory has built the Emira since its prototype stage in 2021

> **"The revised plan includes a facelift for the Emira and a new model in 2027"**

WHEN AUTOCAR VISITED THE NEWLY OPENED HETHEL PLANT

Hethel factory opened in 1967 and Autocar got a full tour of it a year later

Twenty years after owner Colin Chapman built the first Lotus from Austin Seven and Ford Eight parts in the garage of his fiancée's father, the Hethel factory opened, in 1967. Among the first cars built at the former World War II RAF base were Elan S4s, Europa Type 47s and Lotus 7Cs – and in 1968 we were invited to look around it. Scan the QR for more.

MULLER-OTVOS TO McLAREN

Newly formed McLaren Group Holdings has appointed ex-Rolls-Royce CEO Torsten Müller-Ötvös (pictured) as a director. Former Ferrari chairman Luca di Montezemolo has also joined the board.

GOOD VIBES ONLY FOR AMG

Mercedes-AMG will simulate combustion powertrains in its EVs to hit "emotional" benchmarks set by its V8 and V12 cars, said tech chief Markus Schäfer. This could include vibration as well as artificial sound.

The special-edition Atom 4RR is intended primarily for circuit use

OFFICIAL PICTURE

ARIEL MARKS ATOM'S 25TH WITH 525BHP 4RR

Track-focused special edition will be limited to just 25 examples

Ariel has marked the 25th anniversary of the Atom with the new 4RR – the most powerful version yet of the British car maker's uncompromising spaceframe sports car.

With its uprated Honda four-pot sending a huge 525bhp and 406lb ft to the rear wheels, the new special edition is far more powerful than even the outrageous, 475bhp Atom V8 from 2011.

Ariel has not quoted any performance figures, but the standard Atom 4R, on which the 4RR is based, has 400bhp and claims a 0-62mph time of just 2.7sec.

The 4RR is expected to roughly match that car's 680kg kerb weight, which would give a stunning power-to-weight ratio of 770bhp per tonne, meaning it could trim that sprint time to below the 2.5sec mark. That would make it one of the quickest-accelerating combustion-engined cars yet to come out of Britain.

Just 25 examples of the "circuit-focused" special edition will be built to order. Full technical details will be announced later this year.

Ariel says the 4RR has been engineered to enable "the most serious track drivers to explore the limits of the lightweight Atom, while utilising the full extent of their driving skills".

Although heavily evolved over the past 25 years and across four generations, today's Atom remains similar in its styling and construction to the original.

The first-generation Atom, which pioneered the company's trademark tubular spaceframe chassis, used a 120bhp Rover K-series engine, while the Mk2 switched to the Honda Type R engine that's still used today. A supercharger was added as an option in 2005 to bump power to 275bhp.

Power was ramped up to 300bhp with the Atom 3, which introduced a new chassis, suspension system and bodywork – as well as the bewinged Atom V8.

Today's fourth-generation car, which provides the basis for the R and the RR, is all-new apart from the fuel filler cap, steering wheel and pedals. It made the switch to turbocharging as standard and produces 320bhp even in entry-level form.

FELIX PAGE

Atom's design has remained consistent since it was launched in 2000

BYD TAKES AIM AT DEFENDER WITH 677BHP DENZA B5 PHEV

BYD IS TARGETING the Land Rover Defender in the UK with its new B5 – a premium plug-in hybrid 4x4 with competitive off-road stats and supercar levels of power.

Launched in China last year as the Bao 5, it is one of three models from BYD's new SUV sub-brand Fangchengbao, although it is likely to be badged Denza here and positioned as a sibling to that premium brand's Z9 GT shooting brake, which is also heading to the UK.

Denza was founded in 2010 as a joint venture between BYD and Mercedes-Benz, but it is wholly owned by the Chinese firm.

The decision to import the B5 confirms previous reports that BYD would launch its Fangchengbao cars here in a bid to diversify its powertrain offering and tap into new market segments.

BYD has not confirmed any specification details for the B5, but it is expected to be largely unchanged from the model sold in China. That car sits on a 'DMO Super-Hybrid Off-Road' ladder-frame platform and uses a plug-in hybrid powertrain combining a 1.5-litre turbocharged engine with an electric motor on each axle.

The system produces a total output of up to 677bhp and 561lb ft of torque, which is more than any Defender, including the new V8 Octa.

A sizeable 31.8kWh battery supplies enough power for a claimed electric range of up to 78 miles on China's CLTC cycle. That figure is likely to be nearer to 50 miles in practice.

The 4x4 B5 sits on an off-road-friendly ladder-frame chassis

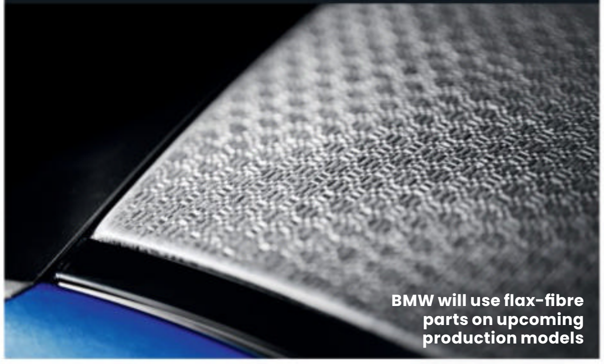
JOB LOSSES AT NISSAN SUNDERLAND PLANT

Nissan will cut around 250 jobs at its Sunderland factory as it looks to "support future competitiveness" following a difficult 2025 so far. The cuts will be part of a voluntary redundancy scheme and will not affect manufacturing staff.

Some 6000 people are employed at the plant, which currently builds the Qashqai and Juke and will soon make the new Leaf. In May, Nissan said it would cut 20,000 jobs and close seven plants globally after recording a £3.8bn net loss last year.

Next big thing

JESSE CROSSE



BMW will use flax-fibre parts on upcoming production models

THE FUTURE LOOKS GOOD FOR NATURAL FIBRE COMPOSITES

AFTER USING A sustainable, natural-fibre composite in motorsport for a number of years, BMW has announced it will be using the flax-based material, developed by Swiss firm Bcomp, on future production models. In testing, the material has proved suitable for a range of uses, including visible A-surface finishes on the interior and exterior.

Several years of R&D have found that composites made from renewable materials are not only able to create attractive surface finishes, but they can also be used for structural components. An example is the roof panel in next-gen cars, where renewable fibre composites can reduce CO_2 equivalent by 40% during production, and it gives end-of-life benefits.

BMW's venture capital arm, I Ventures, holds a stake in Bcomp, which was founded in 2011 to make high-performance skis using flax fibres, and Bcomp became an official BMW Motorsport partner in 2022. Its woven fabric Amplitex is made from European flax fibres, sourced from the plant of the same name. Weaves can vary for different uses and visual effects, and it comes either as fabric or impregnated with thermoplastic resin (prepreg). Structural panels can be reinforced with 'Powerribs', a grid-like mesh also made from flax fibres and bonded to the mat.

BMW first used reinforcement parts made from the natural fibre material in its 2019 Formula E cars, followed by the M4 DTM as well as the M4 GT4, replacing carbonfibre-reinforced plastic (CRFP). The M4 GT4 was equipped with parts made from the new materials for the Nürburgring 24 Hours.

Bcomp says that depending on application, the 'cradle to gate' (extraction of raw materials to leaving the factory) CO_2 footprint can be up to 85% lower compared with conventional composites. Some components can be 50% lighter and reduce the use of plastic by 70% – thermoplastic Powerribs can meet those weight- and plastic-reduction criteria for interior panels.

Bcomp is also working with a number of other car makers. Cupra is using its materials in seats, Kia has used it on the interior of the EV3 and EV4 concepts, Polestar in the Polestar 3, Volvo on the Concept Recharge and Porsche has used it in the 718 Cayman GT4 Clubsport for wings and doors. Along with its announcement, BMW released images of prototype roof panels, a rear diffuser and cabin trim.

Elsewhere, Karuun, a material made from rattan by German firm Out for Space, was used by Nio in its Eve concept back in 2017. It was later used in production in the ET7 and EC7 as a trim material. Karuun Stripe, a rattan veneer, is used in Porsche's Macan Electric for its Nature Tech Material interior trim options.

Composite components are made using fibres from the flax plant

FULLY ACTIVE SUSPENSION POISED TO GO MAINSTREAM

Start-up has created trick suspension that can be fitted to everyday cars

US-based start-up Clearmotion has developed a fully active suspension system that could be fitted to almost any car – and it is set to appear in future Porsches.

Fully active suspension – where the car can control both the extension and compression strokes using an actuator or motor – has been the stuff of dreams for chassis engineers for a long time.

Whereas passive or semi-active suspension (adaptive dampers and/or air suspension) can only ever react to inputs from the road, an active system can effectively pull the wheel up for a bump and push it back down when the road dips, as well as compensate for body pitch and roll in order to keep the car's body perfectly level. In this way, it can theoretically isolate occupants from what is going on underneath. It can also control the load on the four contact patches individually to improve roadholding without compromising the ride.

In a lineage that includes Citroën's hydropneumatic suspension, Mercedes'

IS IT AS GOOD AS PORSCHE'S ACTIVE RIDE?

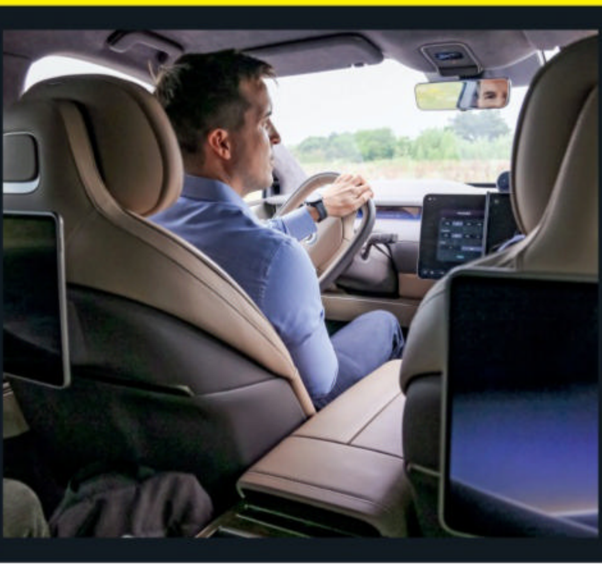
Autocar was invited to Clearmotion's UK tech centre at the Horiba MIRA test track to experience its Nio ET9 demonstrator. In terms of hardware, it was exactly as you can buy it in China, although Clearmotion has tweaked the software to make it more to its own liking – and more suitable for UK roads.

The difficulty with such a system is that it is, by design, underwhelming. The aim is that you can't feel the bumps. It's only when I experience the same road in another car, or with the system turned off, that I realise that this B-road isn't glass-smooth.

Turning the system on is quite spooky: every bit of pitch or head toss just vanishes. Adding on the Roadmotion somehow makes it even smoother. This is a more incremental change than the difference compared with normal air suspension, but it is easy to feel nonetheless.

Is it as good as Porsche's system? Without a back-to-back test, it's hard to say. Equally, it's clearly in the same ballpark, and in a different league from lesser systems.

That said, it's not perfect. The active suspension is spectacular at erasing the big bumps but it can't quite filter out the smaller ripples and asperities in the surface. On the one hand, this is perception: because the primary ride is so smooth, the secondary aspects are drawn into focus. On the other hand, the system doesn't have the bandwidth to filter out such high-frequency inputs yet. The bushes could be made softer, but that would introduce latency as the actuators have to push through their deflection before getting to the job at hand. **IV**



Active Body Control and the Ferrari Purosangue's Multimatic set-up, active systems have always had compromises, such as cost, reliability, functionality or all of the above.

Porsche's Active Ride is arguably the best series-production system so far, but it is very expensive and power-hungry, which means it can only be fitted to cars with a high-voltage electrical system (plug-in hybrids and EVs).

Clearmotion's solution, as demonstrated on Chinese EV maker's ET9 flagship (see box, left), looks remarkably similar to a normal combination of a spring (either air or coil, depending on the application) with a remote-reservoir damper. This compactness and relative simplicity allows it to be installed in many existing cars with minimal modification. It runs on 48V, but a converter allows 12V cars to use it too.

"My objective is to get it into mid-size vehicles"

Clearmotion technical fellow Marco Giovanardi said: "We are a different kind of supplier from the ZFs of this world. We didn't already have a mature product, so we couldn't wait for someone to design a vehicle for us."

Key to the system is a rotary electric motor with its own control unit, which powers a hydraulic pump that forces fluid in or out of the damper. There's one for each corner of the car, rather than a central one, thus eliminating metres of pipework.

This all plugs into a central control unit, which uses data from the car's various sensors to decide what each suspension corner unit should do. Clearmotion doesn't use cameras because they are unreliable in less than perfect conditions, and lidar sensors are expensive and create too much data.

To add in a predictive element, Clearmotion is also developing Roadmotion, which builds up a detailed scan of road surfaces in the cloud by taking in the data from any number of cars. (Anything from the past 10 years with adaptive suspension will do.) This data can then be fed back to cars with active suspension to allow them to anticipate the road surface.

"That data portion of the business has a way bigger potential," said CEO Christian Steinmann. For example, that data could allow autonomous vehicles to avoid potholes and other hazards.

As well as being fitted as standard on the Nio ET9, Clearmotion's suspension will be used on future Porsches. Other OEMs are showing interest too.

With greater scale should come lower costs, said Steinmann: "So far, every application of active suspension has been in ultra-luxury vehicles or race cars. My objective is to get it into mid-size vehicles. We hope to accomplish this within this decade – in China probably by 2027."

ILLYA VERPRAET

Clearmotion's system uses a remote-reservoir damper and an e-motor

Grapevine

MARK TISSHAW

Zellmer (left) receives the Superb's Autocar Award from Tisshaw

SKODA'S KLAUS ZELLMER was one of three global CEOs at the recent Autocar Awards, alongside Kia's Ho Sung Song and McLaren Group's Nick Collins. Peter Rawlinson, who until recently led Lucid as CEO, was also in attendance, as were several other global, Europe and UK executives and leaders.

We were delighted to welcome them, honouring several personally as well as their cars, including the Five-Star Car award for the Superb collected by Zellmer.

The likes of Zellmer could not achieve what they do without their dealers, so it was no surprise to learn that, aside from the Autocar Awards and this interview, Zellmer's brief time in the UK included a dealer visit, as did Song's.

Skoda needs "the human touch" from its dealers more than ever, says Zellmer, in the face of such radical market change with EVs and the need to educate buyers, and also competition from Chinese brands. To that end, the firm has reversed a plan to switch to the agency sales model and will stick with its dealers to sell cars.

"What I love about our dealers is that they have skin in the game," says Zellmer. "They're entrepreneurs. The more you take away from them, they're less incentivised. And it's the spirit – that 'I'm fully responsible'."

The agency model was born out of "a market that wasn't real", he says, with demand exceeding supply as a result of the post-Covid semiconductor shortage.

The stall in EV uptake means "a more conventional system" has been maintained. Zellmer also frankly admits Skoda lacked the IT infrastructure to manage the sales process end to end.

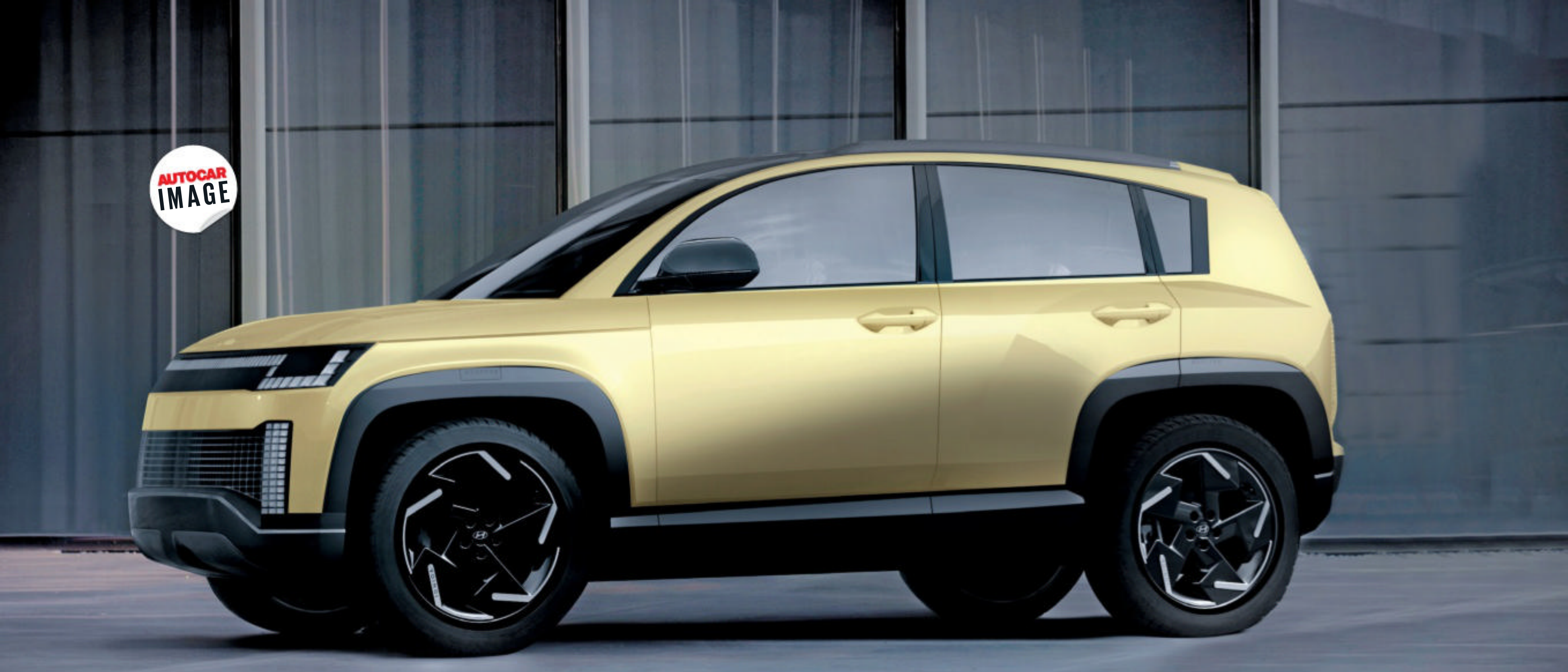
Indeed, the growing need for dealers is evident in retailers scheduling "second delivery" meetings with buyers, in particular for EVs, because of the increased complexity and functionality in cars. While Zellmer wants his cars to remain simple and easy to use ("a little bit of conservatism doesn't hurt"), car makers must still find ways to add features and value. He's refereeing this balancing act personally.

Strong networks are something Chinese car makers are building, too, and Zellmer has a map in his office where he puts pins in places Chinese brands have committed to building production or R&D facilities to circumvent tariffs. He also highlights the engineering power of China: in 2023, the country created 1.6 million patents. Europe had 200,000, the US 600,000 and India 78,000. "And it won't stop there," says Zellmer.

He's up for the challenge and has just signed a three-year contract extension as CEO. Despite his Porsche background, Zellmer "fully identifies with the brand" and sees plenty of parallels with Porsche.

He says: "What I learned at Porsche was the spirit of never being satisfied and always looking for something additional. I found that at Skoda as well."

"I love that our dealers have skin in the game. They're entrepreneurs"



HYUNDAI READIES SMALL CROSSOVER EV FOR 2026

New electric equivalent of Bayon is twinned with forthcoming Kia EV2

Hyundai will reveal a new compact SUV, an electric alternative to the Bayon, in "the next few months" as it continues to expand its EV line-up.

Understood by Autocar to be twinned with sibling brand Kia's incoming EV2, the crossover will plug the gap between the Inster and Kona Electric. This size, similar to that of the ICE-powered Bayon, will position it as a rival to the likes of the Volvo EX30 and Renault 4.

It will be revealed "in the next few months", said new Hyundai Motor Europe CEO Xavier Martinet, which suggests an unveiling at the Munich motor show in September is likely.

Hyundai confirmed it will launch the car in the third quarter of 2026, meaning deliveries could begin as soon as July next year.

Autocar understands the EV2, which was previewed by the EV2 Concept in February, will arrive a few months before it.

Martinet said: "We are very much involved with the electrification of our line-up and to increase our electrified mix in the coming years."

Like the EV2, the new Hyundai will be based on the scalable E-GMP platform that is used by nearly all Hyundai, Kia and Genesis EVs.

New Hyundai will share much of its tech with the Kia EV2 (concept pictured)

It's therefore likely to get a similar set-up to the slightly larger Kia EV3, which is offered with 58.3kWh and 81.4kWh battery packs, offering ranges of 267 and 372 miles respectively. All versions of the EV3 are powered by a single electric motor that sends 201bhp and 209lb ft of torque through the front wheels.

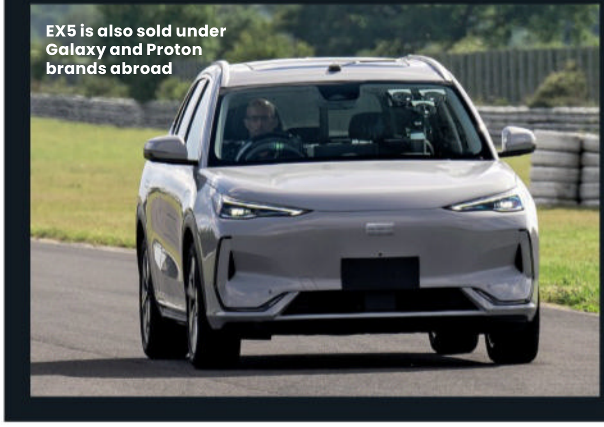
Inside, the new crossover will bring a "step change" in usability for Hyundai. This includes a new infotainment system that, Autocar has been told, will allow for elements, such as ambient lighting and sound, to alter depending on driving modes or style.

Like the forthcoming EV2, it's also expected to get a combined instrument and infotainment display that spans roughly half the width of the dashboard.

Pricing is likely to be close to that of the EV2, at around €30,000 (£25,000).

When it arrives next year, the crossover will be the sixth EV in Hyundai's growing line-up, following the Ioniq 9 flagship SUV, which will hit UK roads in the coming months.
WILL RIMELL

GEELY COMING TO UK WITH LOTUS-APPROVED SUV


EX5 is also sold under Galaxy and Proton brands abroad

GEELY, THE CHINESE firm that owns LEVC, Lotus, Polestar, Volvo and more, is bringing its eponymous car brand to the UK.

The first model sold here will be the EX5, an electric crossover pitched against the Skoda Elroq, Kia EV3 and Renault Megane.

UK specifications have yet to be confirmed, but Geely said the EX5 is being assessed by Hethel-based Lotus Engineering to evaluate whether it requires retuning for European roads.

In other markets, the EX5 is offered with a choice of 49.5kWh and 60.2kWh batteries, with the latter getting a WLTP range of up to 264 miles. It has a single front-mounted motor that puts out 215bhp, for a 0-62mph time of 6.9sec.

Inside, the EX5 seats five and features a 15.4in infotainment touchscreen.

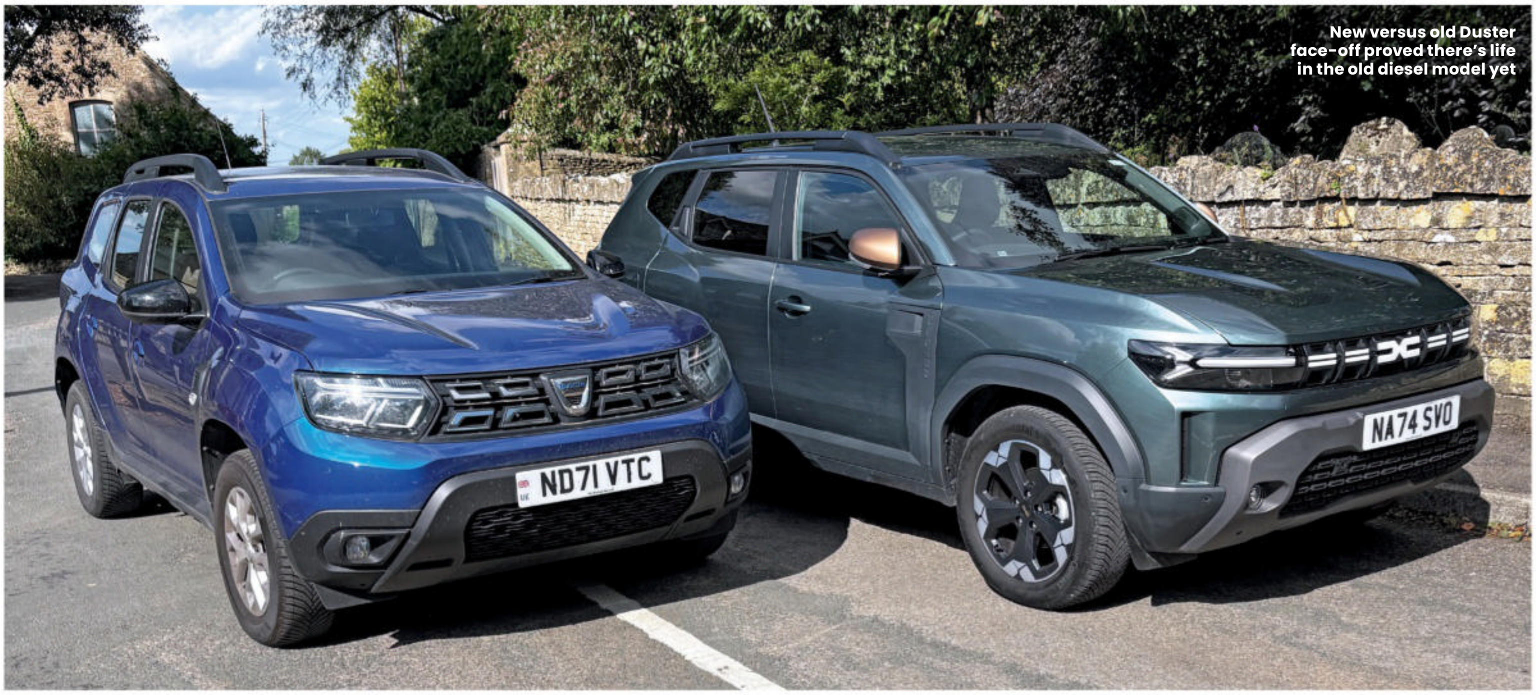
It starts from $40,990 in Australia, hinting at a price of between £25,000 and £30,000 in the UK. Deliveries are set to begin in October.

Geely said that fleet buyers are expected to be a "key segment" for the model. Indeed, they account for the majority of UK EV sales at present.

The move comes as Geely attempts to tap new markets for rapid growth. It sold nearly 2.2 million cars last year, an improvement of 34% over 2023.

MY WEEK IN CARS

Steve Cropley



New versus old Duster face-off proved there's life in the old diesel model yet

SUNDAY

For ages I've been wanting to test the latest Dacia Duster 4x4, now powered by a mild-hybrid 1.2-litre petrol triple, directly against my own old-shape 21-plate 4x4 diesel. I spent a happy afternoon avoiding the gardening by putting the pair over the same 150-mile combination of roads I know well. Now I have the truth, and it's a bit different from what I expected.

The new car is the better one by miles: better looking and far nicer inside. The beneficial effect of its up-to-date platform on road refinement is obvious with every mile. My car looks and feels old – except for a couple of things. That diesel engine may chunter when the new one's three-cylinder zings, but it's noticeably more flexible and easy to drive. My car bounces a bit more, but its wheel control is better in potholes. Its steering is pleasantly firmer, too, and its fuel consumption is a clear 10-12mpg better, which means it goes 80-100 miles farther on a tank. The latest Duster is deservedly an Autocar Award winner, but I reckon that accolade is mostly earned by the top-selling two-wheel-drive full hybrid with its novel, highly efficient automatic gearbox. My own plans to quit the diesel 4x4 have been shelved.

Ferrari has been bigging-up the Amalfi's look, but haven't we seen it before?

> **"It's the smooth ride I enjoy more than the badge or decor"**

TUESDAY

Refinement in cars has always been top of my priorities. In a Bentley or Rolls-Royce it's the smooth ride and lack of NVH I enjoy more than the badge or the decor. Such feelings were reinforced – and have lingered for a week – since an encounter with the latest Genesis Electrified G80, a big and rare EV recently revived on a longer wheelbase and with a sub-£80k price tag, despite amazing equipment. Genesis has struggled in the UK so its cars are rarely at front of mind, but this G80 (now with the three secret weapons of a long-wheelbase ride, four-wheel steering and active noise cancelling) deserves to be taken very seriously.

THURSDAY

Ferrari's impressive new Amalfi looks as good as the manufacturer's contemporary models always do: it has always been great at finding new faces for cars that must share similar proportions to their ancestors and descendants. But it strikes me that Maranello's spokespeople have opened their mouths a bit too wide this time. The press bumf accompanying official launch pictures reckons the Amalfi "redefines the concept of contemporary sportiness" in cars like this, and brings us "a new design language".

No question, the car is handsome and desirable. But in another colour than Rosso Corsa, and without a black-on-yellow horse shield on its frontal flank, it doesn't look so different from a well-kept Jaguar F-Type coupé, launched 11 years ago and these days available in optimum spec for less than £50,000.

FRIDAY

My pal Bill, a serial Porsche 911 owner, has just spent a princely £8000 on a very different kind of new car, and he is as delighted as if they had just bunged his name on the latest GT3: a nine-year-old Fiat Panda 4x4 Twinair. Bill's house is very difficult to access in snow unless his car combines 4x4 traction with very small proportions. This Fiat, which he proudly showed me this week, comes in his preferred shade of dark blue with a full service history and an odometer reading of just 26,000 miles.

It would be wrong to imagine Bill will restrict his use of the Panda to winter driving. He'll be in it all the time, having just sadly parted with a much older Panda 4x4 (it dissolved in front of the MOT man) because he doted on its quixotic looks and nature. It would give him great pleasure, he says, to switch on an enigmatic smile when friends and family asked why on earth he chose this thing above other cars. Now, that simple pleasure can continue.

AND ANOTHER THING

It's Ariel's 25th anniversary, and more stories in these pages will soon be celebrating that fact. Meantime, Matt Prior, Max Edleston and I – accompanied by the Ford Raptor as the camera platform – spent a happy afternoon helping Simon and Henry Saunders celebrate their great moment. More on that soon too.

GET IN TOUCH
steve.cropley@haymarket.com

PRIOR CONVICTION

Matt Prior

Please tell me it's not just me, dear reader, who sometimes looks at a new car – something I do on a more than occasional basis – and with the best will in the world couldn't say what it is.

There are so many more new cars than there used to be, so many more of them are crossovers than they used to be and, by gum, so many of them look the same that I am, on occasion, utterly lost. I can't tell one from another.

This is a new experience for me. I always proudly thought that if I witnessed a robbery I'd be able to tell the police what make, model and trim level a getaway car was, and I'd probably be able to name its colour and wheel design. Actually that may be a bad example, because I already know it will be an Audi RS3.

But let's say an anonymous grey crossover is involved in a hit and run and a nearby copper asks me for a statement about what car was involved. I increasingly fear I'd have to shrug and offer up a simple: "Haven't a clue, mate. One of those new electric SUVs. I think."

Strictly speaking, thinking that all cars look the same isn't a new phenomenon. In an issue of Performance Car I bought back in the early 1990s, the magazine printed a series of silhouettes of D-segment hatchbacks from the time: a Ford Mondeo, a Nissan Primera, a Toyota Carina and so on. Their gag was that if you could identify none of them from their outline alone, you were a true Performance Car reader. But if you could tell most of them apart, you were an Autocar & Motor reader.

But while not a new thing, I think events have recently progressed at speed. I don't know about today's Autocar reader, but I can tell you this Autocar writer of two decades would struggle to tell plenty of new models apart even if they weren't reduced to their silhouettes. Even on a clear day I'm not at all confident I could tell a Geely EX5 from a BYD Atto 3 until I got close enough to read the badges.

"Mummy, I'm scared": BMW's XM isn't pretty, but at least you'd spot it in a police line-up

Why is this? Have all the good shapes already been taken? Are we now drawing the same ones again because, basically, we have to?

In national treasure (and Ferrari F12tdf owner) Hugh Grant's rather grizzly new film Heretic, our villain tells a story, and it's mostly true, of how Radiohead were sued by The Hollies because parts of Creep were taken from The Air That I Breathe. But then Radiohead got legal with Lana Del Rey because her Get Free sounded too much like Creep.

> **"Are we drawing the same shapes again because we have to?"**

Are we just, y'know, running out of notes? And if so, is it really so surprising we're running out of lines? There only so many ways you can draw around four wheels and a car's oily (or electrical) bits if one also has to include the certain number and location of seats, doors, windows and lights, plus bumpers so soft that hitting a deer writes off the car. So the new Ford Capri looks a bit like a Polestar 2? Well, it has to look like something.

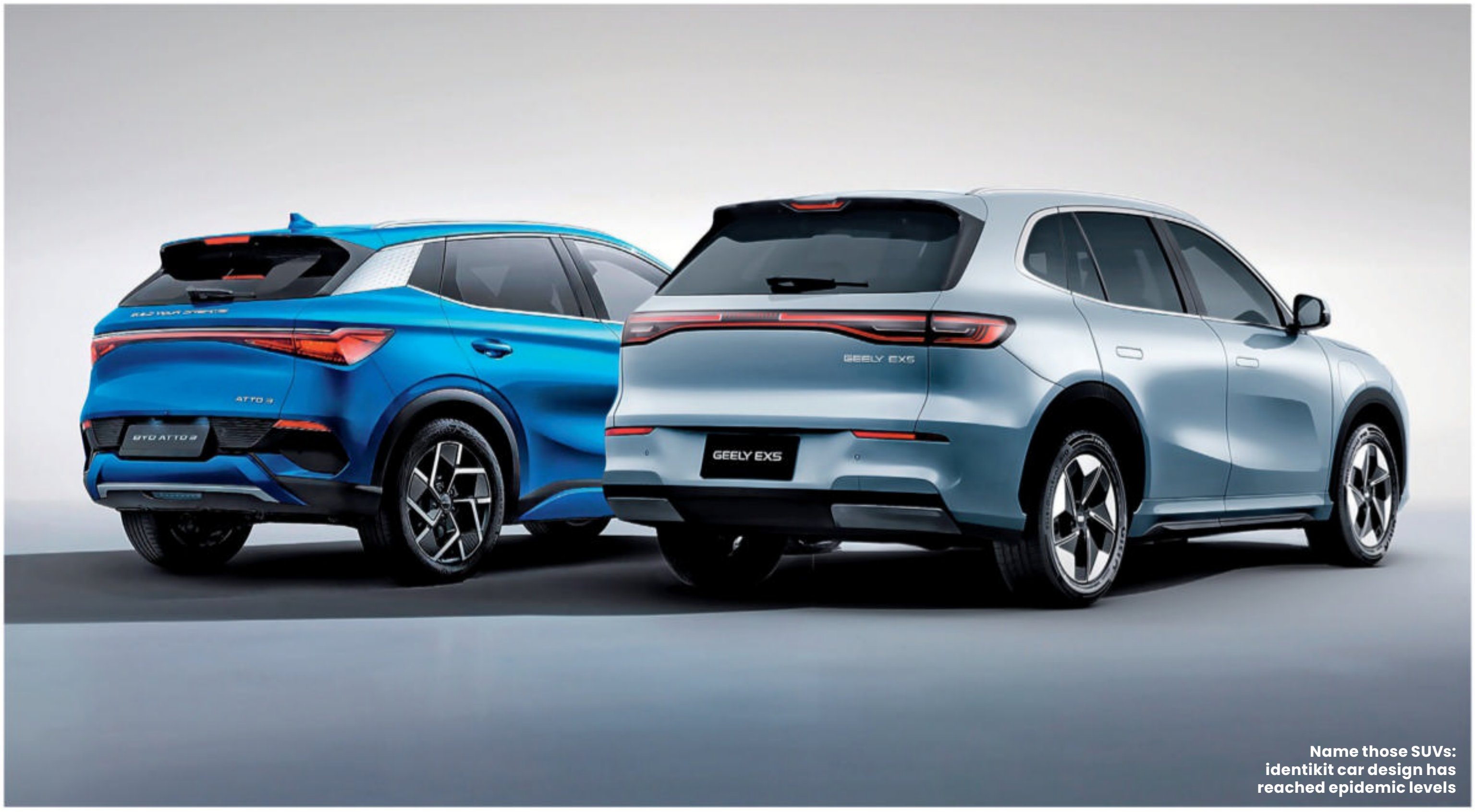
Maybe I should start being kinder to wilfully ugly cars. Say what you like about the absolute munter that is BMW's XM – plenty of people have – but you will not mistake it for an Omoda 5.

I think electrification isn't helpful. If you don't need a grille to cool an engine then you don't have a signature identifier in the most prominent position on the car. In fact, given that it would upset the aerodynamics so much – and that's so important for an electric car's range – you'd better not have one. A person can design plenty of different pretty shapes, but a wind tunnel will say only one of them is the most efficient.

That's something that's true of even the latest batch of hypercars. I can tell one of those from another, just about, but when outright performance is the overriding criterion, there is still only one way that will work best.

Perhaps, then, the surprise shouldn't be that I can't tell so many new cars apart. But that there are still so many I can.

GET IN TOUCH
matthew.prior@haymarket.com



Name those SUVs: identikit car design has reached epidemic levels

RACING LINES

Damien Smith

Evans has another great shot at becoming Britain's third WRC champ

As the second half of the World Rally Championship begins in Estonia this month, the hanging question remains: has Elfyn Evans got what it takes to join the legendary Colin McRae and Richard Burns as Britain's third world champion on the special stages?

After a great start to the season in which he claimed two wins from the first three events, the Welshman has come through a testing trio of rough gravel rallies where his points lead was rewarded with the significant penalty of running first as 'road sweeper'. That left him with little alternative but to drop into damage limitation mode, as he resorted to a consistent approach to at least keep his score ticking over – which means he still leads the championship but by a vastly reduced margin.

At least the Toyota GR Yaris driver can now console himself that first on the road will no longer hurt him as the WRC heads to the fast, smooth forest roads of Estonia on 17-20 July. It's time for Evans to unleash some speed to see off his closest rivals. But which of three is the biggest threat to the four-time runner-up's title hopes?

TANAK IS GREECE LIGHTNING

The answer might well be Ott Tänak, even though Hyundai has claimed only one win from the first seven rallies this term. The 2019 world champion ended Toyota's 2025 unbeaten streak with a gritty victory over the punishing rocky terrain of Acropolis Rally Greece at the end of June, in temperatures that hit a sweaty 40deg C.

Estonian Tänak had a gearbox scare on the final Power Stage and feared his i20 N might not make the 50km road section that he and co-driver Martin Järveoja needed to complete before victory celebrations could begin. But they made it to confirm Tänak's 22nd career win and first since October last year.

He's now just 12 points behind Evans, despite Toyota Gazoo's emphatic 6-1 score over Hyundai.

> **"He was left teetering on the edge of a frightening plunge"**

What about Sébastien Ogier? The eight-time champion was Tänak's only threat in Greece after back-to-back wins in Portugal and Sardinia and lies second in the standings, nine points off Toyota team-mate Evans. But he won't be in Estonia, because he still won't commit to a full WRC campaign. You would think logic would lead to a change of heart with Sébastien Loeb's record of nine crowns seemingly within touching distance. But at 41, the Frenchman is simply not motivated to chase titles at this stage of his life. So should we rule him out, or might one of rallying's greatest drivers still be a factor? At this point, it's impossible to say for certain.

The biggest surprise of 2025 has been the largely indifferent form of Kalle Rovanperä. He won on Gran Canaria and appeared to be building some momentum to challenge Evans over the second half of the season, but the Acropolis was a bit of a disaster for the 24-year-old Finn. He was running only seventh on the Saturday when an error left his GR Yaris teetering on the edge of a frightening plunge off the road, and he was forced to retire with damage.

Lamborghini finally won the Spa 24 Hours after a decade of trying

But having returned on the Sunday to bag some points, Rovanperä is still only 31 points off Evans' lead as he bids for a third world title in four years. It's all delicately poised for what should be a gripping second half of 2025.

LAMBORGHINI'S BIGGEST WIN

Another week, another classic 24-hour race. Hot on the heels of twice-around-the-clock endurance 'majors' at Le Mans and the Nürburgring, it was Spa-Francorchamps' turn at the end of June.

This time, Grasser Racing's Lamborghini Huracán claimed what probably has to be counted as the illustrious – but not always particularly sporty – Italian supercar manufacturer's biggest race win.

Italian Mirko Bortolotti, German Luca Engstler and South African Jordan Pepper steered the GT3 Lambo to victory, although hearts were aflutter when Bortolotti struggled to fire the car back into life at the final pit stop. He rejoined just ahead of Rutronik Racing's Porsche 911, which had lost the lead through a puncture at Blanchimont – never a pleasant experience.

NO ELECTION CAMPAIGN FOR SAINZ

It's disappointing to hear that Carlos Sainz Sr has decided not to stand for FIA president after all when the governing body holds its election in December. The Spanish rallying legend and father of Williams Formula 1 driver Carlos Sainz Jr had emerged as the only opposition – at least that we currently know of – to current president Mohammed Ben Sulayem. Sainz cited his Dakar Rally commitment to Ford as part of his reason not to stand. But there will be more to it than that.

Exasperation at Ben Sulayem's style of leadership remains high, but will he walk into a second term unopposed? It seems inconceivable that someone won't take him on. There's still time for a candidate to step forward.

YOUR VIEWS

WRITE TO autocar@haymarket.com

Letter of the week

A DIESEL STOLE MY HEART

I was intrigued by the feature on diesel cars in your 4 June issue and would like to report my own experience.

Searching for a fun family car, I looked at a Volkswagen Golf R and a Ford Focus ST but felt that both lacked something. My son then suggested a BMW M340d. Wary of the whole diesel issue, we went for a test drive in a 2021 car. I will admit to being blown away, and the car has since been bought.

For my driving, a mix of urban slog and motorway pounding, the car excels. It seems equally happy to trundle along (luxuriously and quietly) at low urban speeds in traffic and to storm down the motorway (safely and comfortable) or tackle a B-road blast. The engine is supremely smooth at any speed.

While I was averse to an automatic car, I find that I never touch the paddle selectors and doubt I ever will. On top of this, I have averaged 45mpg (in mixed motoring) to date, carrying myself and my family.

Prior to the test, I had not considered such a diesel. I feel that people with my kind of needs should hunt these cars out before they become extinct.

Craig Bowers, via email

SUZUKI CAPPUCCINO, SIR?

The sad tale of the Suzuki salesman who found selling premium products more challenging than mainstream ones (Your Views, 18 June) appeared to lay his woes squarely at the feet of JLR. This, I consider, is unfairly maligning the company, which currently seems to be experiencing unwarranted brickbats from all directions.

I spent more than 30 years in the franchised motor trade, both in management and sales, and mainly for large dealer groups selling a wide range of products from top-end to lower-price makes. I found a couple of factors tended to separate buyers in the two categories: the level of expectation and, in the premium sector, customers often had more noticeable drive to get what they wanted.

I give a simple example concerning showroom coffee. A cousin purchased a Skoda back in the day when the product was often labelled 'a joke'. During the sales visit he was offered a coffee, which really impressed him, even if it was probably an 'instant' one rustled up in the back office. During my time more recently with a premium German make, showroom staff served a good-quality filter coffee in fine bone china. This was generally well received; however, on being offered a coffee, one customer indignantly enquired if a wider choice was available. Nowadays, the same showroom doubtless has a machine dispensing a full selection of the beverage.

Yes, it's all about expectations and, Mr Suzuki Salesman, the ability to meet them.

Jeff Loomes
Hartley, Kent

CORRECTED CORRECTION

Twice now you have incorrectly quoted VED rates (Prior Conviction, 4 June; Your Views, 18 June). Band K (£430 a year) includes cars that have a CO_2 figure over 225g/km but were registered before 23 March 2006. Nick Tiley was surprised his 2006 Aston Martin wasn't a March 2006 car and hence had a higher VED rate, and any Porsche Boxster registered before April 2006 is also £430 a year. I know – I have one.

Richard Chappelle
Via email

A NATIONAL DISGRACE

I concur with Rachel Burgess's comments about the smooth roads on her recent trip to France with her long-term test car (18 June) – but it's not just France. I've just returned from a touring holiday that also included Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Liechtenstein and Austria, and in all those countries I found the roads well maintained, smooth and totally pothole-free.

As soon as I was back in the UK, my suspension was working overtime crashing and banging over poor repairs, potholes and sunken grids and manhole covers.

What a national disgrace our roads have become.

Colin Charlesworth
Via email

FERRARI-BAITING SKODA

In Illya Verpraet's appraisal of the Skoda Elroq vRS (First drives, 18 June), he states that it is a "practical electric crossover with four-wheel drive and a bit of punch". A 0-62mph time of 5.4sec not so long ago was Ferrari fast. I would think that this was quite good for a practical family car!

David Williams
Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk

Porsche of all brands is keeping the off-road estate car alive

This or a Testarossa? Same difference, suggests David

We're not sold on this steering wheel and neither is Gerry

CCTV UNPLUGGED

A few years ago, we fitted all our family and company vehicles with dashcams – the elegant non-screen, cigar-shaped versions that fit hidden behind the interior mirror.

Last month, I was hit by a bus pulling out while I was stationary in traffic. Having exchanged details, I drove home to download the dashcam footage – but the memory card was half in, half out.

The last recording was of BMW technicians in the local dealership. I remembered that it had been in for a service recently. I then checked our Mercedes SL and Porsche Cayenne, which had also been serviced recently: both their dashcams had their live plugs pulled out, but this was not visible behind the mirrors.

I now realise that this is common practice, presumably so that we do not see or hear what goes on in the workshop, but it is likely to have cost me an accident repair and a guaranteed no-claims bonus life.

Kevin Macliver
Birmingham

A SPARKY SPEAKS

David Taylor claims that nails and screws left behind by tradesmen's vans are to blame for many punctures (18 June).

As a domestic electrician, I regularly checked around our van wherever we had been working. I was well aware that it did not have to be one of our discarded fixings that resulted in a puncture – we would still get the blame.

Quite apart from the cost, inconvenience and danger resulting from a gradually deflating tyre, just one incident could be the 'nail in the coffin' of our customer relationship. Once something has gone wrong, matters can inexorably deteriorate – and somehow the claim that "it wasn't us who did that" just makes things worse.

JR Richardson
Droomer, Cumbria

IN SHIP SHAPE

I can't help feeling the otherwise pleasant and cleanly styled interior of the DS N°8 is spoilt by the fussy and wilfully odd X-shaped steering wheel, seemingly pinched from the Cutty Sark. Surely a modern iteration of the single-spoker that the original Citroën DS pioneered, preferably with a fixed centre boss and controls, would have been functionally and aesthetically superior and more in keeping?

Gerry Hinde
Via email

WHO CAN YOU TRUST?

Every week we see articles about another manufacturer from China coming to the UK. All very fine, but a recent survey by Jato Dynamics reported in The Economist found that there are presently 115 Chinese EV brands, with many of these in the red financially. Maybe 95% of them will go, like many of the solar panel manufacturers.
Let the buyer beware.

John Walsh
Limerick, Ireland

STILL RIDING HIGH

Alex Wolstenholme's examination of the jacked-up estate car (Why I Love, 18 June) was interesting, and he is almost right about its demise – but there is one car left clinging on in there. The Porsche Taycan Cross Turismo is 20mm higher than the Taycan Sport Turismo. Vive la difference.

Simon Daukes
Via email

Weekly winner

Letter of the week wins this ValetPro exterior protection and maintenance kit worth £48

GREAT REASONS TO BUY

Next week's issue

ON SALE 16 JULY

FIRST DRIVE

FERRARI F80

Matt Prior assesses this new F1-inspired, 1184bhp, V6 hybrid hypercar

INTERVIEW

"I COULD HAVE JUST TUMBLED OFF TO THE BEACH"

British industry veteran Adrian Hallmark tells us why he left a booming Bentley to take on the formidable task of turning Aston Martin around

DRIVEN

BUGATTI W16 MISTRAL

The W16 era ends with this limited-run roadster. Is it a fitting finale?

EVERY WEEK

USED GUIDE

SKODA FABIA

Who needs multimillion-pound hypercars when you can have a brilliant supermini for just £1500?

LIVING WITH A...

DACIA DUSTER

Can this new budget 4x4 live up to its name and cope with off-road excursions? We find out

CONTENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

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The original car magazine, published since 1895 'in the interests of the mechanically propelled road carriage'

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Email autocar@haymarket.com
Editor Mark Tisshaw
Editor-in-chief Steve Cropley
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Digital editor Murray Scullion
Deputy editor Felix Page
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Chief sub-editor Kris Culmer
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Picture editor Ben Summerell-Youde
Social media executive Jonathan Bryce
Content creator apprentice Sophia Grace

EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTORS
European editor Greg Kable
Motorsport editor Damien Smith
Business correspondent Nick Gibbs
Technology correspondent Jesse Crosse
Senior correspondent John Evans
Senior contributing writer Andrew Frankel
Regular contributors John Bradshaw, Richard Bremner, Alastair Clements, Tim Dickson, James Disdale, Peter Liddiard, Peter McSean, Richard Webber

MEDIA ENQUIRIES
Email autocar@haymarket.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS
Tel 0344 848 8816
Overseas +44 (0)1604 251450
Email subscriptions.team@haymarket.com

SYNDICATION ENQUIRIES
Tel +44 (0)1962 867705
Contact Simon Fox
(simon@foxsyndication.com)

LICENSING ENQUIRIES
Contact Kate Hannam
(kate.hannam@haymarket.com)

BACK ISSUES
Tel 0344 848 8816
Email help@autocar.themagazineshop.com

ADVERTISING
Head of trading and agency development Richard Potton
(richard.potton@haymarket.com)
Account manager (display) Millie Remie
(millie.remie@haymarket.com)

PUBLISHING
Newstrade marketing manager
Isabella McDermid
Newstrade marketing executive
Lance Pereira

PRODUCTION
Tel +44 (0)20 8267 5639
Head of production operations
Trevor Simpson
Group production manager Ailsa Donovan

MANAGEMENT
Managing director Rachael Prasher
Marketing director Darren Pitt

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FIRST DRIVES

TESTED 3.7.25, GOTHENBURG, SWEDEN **DELIVERIES** NOW

VOLVO XC60

Does nip and tuck for top-selling Volvo go far enough?

Somewhere in a parallel universe without CO_2 emissions and electric cars, an all-new Volvo XC60 was launched to the press last week. In that world, just as in ours, it has lately become the most important car the company makes – the most popular model it has ever sold, no less. It would be crazy not to invest large in a car like that.

And yet here we are. In our world, what we're getting amounts to little more than a lightly facelifted version of the second-generation XC60, itself launched in 2017, in a similar vein to what we have seen with the big-brother XC90. An all-electric EX60 will be along in 2026, and at that point this car will soldier on in showrooms much as the XC90 is expected to do now, a little like a septuagenarian schoolmaster just months from retirement whose five grandchildren suddenly move in at home under tragic circumstances, and all need new shoes and hot dinners.

Or that is how it looks. Truth is, plenty of other car makers extend the life of existing models in a similar way, as all the R&D cash goes into electric models that may or may not ever deliver a return. Many of those manufacturers just do a better job of making mutton look – and, figuratively at least, taste – like lamb.

But Volvo is too honest and straightforward a company to really seek to deceive you by putting very many fresh clothes on old bones (although it's also a company whose corporate strategy has flip-flopped more than a travelling swimming team these past few years, making normal product investment decisions impossible). That's why this 'new' car has so little to make it seem, well, new. There's a new front bumper and radiator grille; new headlights and dark smoked tail-lights; some new alloy wheel designs and paint choices; and, externally at least, that's it.

There's nothing new about this car's engine line-up either, just as there wasn't with the XC90. The 247bhp B5 all-wheel-drive mild-hybrid petrol keeps on trucking,

The XC60's family-friendly practicality and usability is undimmed

THIS WEEK'S HIGHLIGHTS

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HOW WE TEST CARS

Autocar delivers several kinds of reviews on new cars, with different levels of technical and functional scrutiny. As the name suggests, our First Drives section typically addresses cars that we're driving for the first time – either in final production form or as late prototypes. Time in the car can be limited here, technical and equipment specification might not be finalised and some systems software may not be to production specification. For those reasons, First Drive reports don't have star ratings.

Once we have driven a car for a second time in the UK, in right-hand-drive form and typically at greater length, we will rate it, either as part of a shorter UK test report or as the subject of a full, instrumented Road Test.

In the latter case, we take empirical performance and refinement benchmarks from it at Horiba MIRA proving ground, as well as subjective limit handling impressions, plus key measurements of practicality, efficiency and kerb weight.

All UK tests and Road Tests receive proper verdicts with star ratings informed by everything we have learned and the combined impressions and experience of several testers.

TESTER'S NOTE

New touchscreen aside, the only interior feature meaningfully different on this updated XC60 is the new two-and-a-half-berth cupholder. That aside, it's just speaker grilles, dashboard trim and seat upholstery. **MS**

Ultra trim's adaptive air suspension gives a smooth, quiet ride, even on 21in rims

"Agility and body control are where you expect them on a bigger than average Volvo"

Touchscreen has a sharp display and fast responses; seats are very supportive

alongside both 347bhp T6 and 449bhp T8 plug-in hybrid petrols. Other markets can have a 296bhp B6 AWD petrol, which Europe is denied for emissions reasons. But Volvo only had T8 PHEV demonstrators to test on the European launch, in range-topping Ultra trim (which adds adaptively damped air suspension rather than the car's standard passive springs).

On the inside, Volvo is turning to digital technology to give this car its biggest selling point. Specifically, that would be the 11.2in, portrait-oriented, Android-powered touchscreen infotainment system, which looks a little like it has been forcibly inserted into a space slightly too small for it in the middle of the fascia. Nonetheless, it has a sharper display, faster responses and better connected functionality than the one it replaces.

Volvo certainly seems to be refining this system little by little, having made more ADAS functions accessible at a top level within its menus. Honestly, aspects of its usability would still regularly and seriously irk me, and I'd find it a lot less distracting from the business of driving with some kind of separate cursor controller. But then I'm not an Android-based smartphone user and don't, therefore, tap into the way it can sync with your Google account, so I probably don't appreciate it at its best.

It's a shame the touchscreen isn't some nonpareil of easy use, though, because that's very much what the rest of this car is all about. The multi-adjustable front seats, with their quilted Nordico not-quite-leather upholstery, allow a great, well-supported driving position. The hybrid system makes for responsive, relaxing progress through the suburbs. And, with Volvo having made additional cabin isolation measures one of the more meaningful material developments that this updated car brings, the four-cylinder combustion engine now runs a bit more quietly and smoothly when it's called to, puncturing the aura of calm less noticeably than equivalent engines of previous PHEVs once did.

On air suspension, the XC60's ride seemed gentle, quiet and absorbent on Swedish roads, even on 21in wheels. Handling agility and body control are about where you would expect them to be on a bigger than average Volvo: not brilliant but respectable enough, although neither makes driving the car a chore. If anything, and thanks to those new refinement measures and its few slightly richer trim materials, this XC60 feels like a car that knows what it's for more than its predecessor did – and that is no bad thing.

Even so, it feels like the clock is now ticking for the XC60. This was Europe's best-selling PHEV last year, and right now it continues to have plenty of laid-back, rational appeal. But unless Volvo is keeping back a meaningful update for its hybrid system, it is likely to lose a lot of its on-paper allure when the time for mandatory homologation under stricter Euro 6e-bis rules comes.

While its rivals get younger and younger, then, and better prepared for the next era of emissions compliance, Volvo's popularity champion could start to look very old very quickly. It may always be a sound, mature choice, but perhaps not such a smart one as once it was.

MATT SAUNDERS

TECH SPEC

VOLVO XC60 T8 AWD PLUG-IN HYBRID ULTRA

Volvo's popularity champ changes little and gains some fresh charm – but its electrified powertrains may come with a sell-by date

Price £68,860
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1969cc, turbocharged, petrol, plus electric motor
Power 449bhp at 6000rpm
Torque 523lb ft at 3000-4800rpm
Gearbox 8-spd automatic, 4WD
Kerb weight 2093kg
0-62mph 4.9sec
Top speed 112mph
Battery 18.8/14.7kWh (total/usable)
Economy 201.8-313.9mpg
Electric range 41-50 miles
CO_2, tax band 22-32g/km, 9%
Rivals Mercedes-Benz GLC 300e, Volkswagen Tiguan eHybrid

TESTED 24.6.25, FARO, PORTUGAL **DELIVERIES** EARLY 2026

LEXUS RZ 350E

Lexus addresses the key flaw – and more – of its luxurious electric SUV

While many mid-life updates take the form of minor design changes or some additional equipment, the revised Lexus RZ brings a host of firsts for the luxury Japanese brand.

It's the first electric Lexus with a performance F Sport trim level and the first car in the UK available with a steer-by-wire system, complete with a yoke for a steering wheel (pictured, far right) and simulated manual gearshifts.

More broadly, changes include battery upgrades, improvements to body rigidity and handling and enhanced comfort.

They apply across a three-model range that comprises the single-motor, front-wheel-drive RZ 350e (our main focus here, as Lexus anticipates it will take a 65% share of RZ sales in the UK, mostly in middling Premium Plus trim), the dual-motor, four-wheel-drive 500e and the more overtly performance-oriented 550e (see right).

The most significant change is the introduction of a slightly larger (77kWh) battery, with a new cooling system and pre-conditioning for rapid charging. It addresses the original RZ's biggest flaw, a comparatively short range, upping the total from 297 to 353 miles in the 350e (and to 311 miles in the 500e).

Lexus has also added a more powerful (22kW) on-board AC charger and worked to improve DC charging performance in lower temperatures, although the maximum rate remains 150kW.

The 350e's single motor produces 221bhp and 198lb ft of torque, which propels the two-tonne SUV from 0-62mph in a reasonably brisk 7.5sec. The dual-motor 500e gets a performance boost over the old 450e too: its combined total of 376bhp lets it hit 62mph in 4.4sec.

Power delivery is smooth but unexciting, which is likely to suit Lexus's typical customer base better than the more aggressive Tesla Model Y, which will sprint to 62mph almost two seconds quicker.

350e's look is unchanged; bi-tone paint is available on Premium Plus trim up

Further changes beneath the metal concern the RZ's suspension, with adjustments made to the front bushings and the front and rear dampers. Lexus also claims body rigidity has been improved with additional bracing, to the benefit of handling.

The RZ still isn't keen to be thrown into corners with much vigour, but it's effortless to drive and will navigate most turns with ease, as a premium SUV should, and it's more direct and simpler to guide than the Volvo EX40.

In basic 300e form, the RZ rides softly and makes light work of potholes and other road corrugations. I found the 18in wheels soaked up the Algarve's more fractured road surfaces far more agreeably than the 550e's 20in rims.

The RZ's trump card is its classy interior, which is cosseting and comfortable in typical Lexus fashion. Material quality is high,

TESTER'S NOTE

Claimed range is heavily dependent on specification. Cars on 18in wheels are put at 353 miles, while those with 20in wheels drop to 316 miles. **JW**

Driver's display could be sharper; Ultrasuede is 30% plant-based

Comfort is its main priority but it tackles corners in fuss-free way

> **"New soundproofing and insulation make it quieter and more refined than before"**

from the plush seats to the soft-touch Ultrasuede upholstery and synthetic leather.

Lexus has made an effort to improve soundproofing and insulation through better floor adhesives, noise-reducing felt and a new motor mount design that better suppresses vibration. All this makes the RZ quieter and more refined than before over most road surfaces, more so than the EX40.

Is it more efficient, though? Over a 60-mile driving route, my test car returned 3.7mpkWh, equal to 284 miles on a full charge – quite some way off Lexus's claim of 353 miles, although I did make liberal use of the air conditioning in sweltering weather. It's not far off the Audi Q6 E-tron, which has a much bigger battery but achieved 2.9mpkWh in our hands, corresponding to around 290 miles.

Pricing isn't yet confirmed but a slight increase over the current £50,000 starting point is expected. That's not cheap, but you get ambient lighting, a panoramic roof, wireless phone charging and dual-zone climate control as standard. My Premium Plus test car also had ventilated memory seats, a head-up display and control touchpads on the steering wheel.

While the changes to the RZ aren't revolutionary, they do combine to make this car a more compelling package than before. Addressing the model's largest weakness – range – has brought it more in line with premium rivals such as the Audi Q4 E-tron and the Genesis GV60. Further exploration on UK roads will reveal how many strings the comfortable and refined RZ 350e now has to its bow.

JACK WARRICK

TECH SPEC

LEXUS RZ 350E PREMIUM PLUS

Now more capable; efficiency tests in the UK will reveal its true potential

Price £52,000 (est)
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 221bhp
Torque 198lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight 2050kg
0-62mph 7.5sec
Top speed 99mph
Battery 77kWh (total)
Range, economy 353 miles, 4.3mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Audi Q4 E-tron, Genesis GV60

TESTED 24.6.25, FARO, PORTUGAL **DELIVERIES** EARLY 2026

LEXUS RZ 550E

New F Sport trim ushers in fresh tech

THE FLAGSHIP OF the RZ line-up and the first Lexus EV to receive an F Sport makeover, the new RZ 550e is also the inaugural model in the Japanese firm's line-up to receive a sophisticated steer-by-wire system and a simulated manual drive shift.

At 402bhp, power is up on the dual-motor 500e, but range from the same 77kWh battery is down to 280 miles – significantly less than the dual-motor Volvo EX40's 323 miles.

In addition, the 550e F Sport gets sportier bodywork, including 20in wheels, bumper air ducts, a rear diffuser and a rear spoiler.

Owing to its larger wheels, plus retuned spring rates and shock absorbers, the F Sport rides more rigidly than standard RZs. Speed bumps, potholes and road cracks are more noticeable as a result, but snug sports seats help ensure it's never uncomfortable.

Lexus's One Motion Grip steer-by-wire system, which removes any mechanical link between the steering wheel and the wheels by controlling inputs through electric signals, has been a long time coming (we drove a prototype back in 2022) but is now included as standard on the F Sport and plusher F Sport Takumi variants.

Complete with a yoke in place of a wheel, the system feels surreal and unnatural at first, requiring just a 200deg turn from neutral to full lock in both directions. There is a learning curve here, but after some familiarisation you begin to trust the system's varying steer ratios and where to put your hands.

Aided by those fancy new wheels and performance bodywork, the F Sport is a touch more accurate and progressive in corners than a standard RZ. It certainly adds a sense of occasion, although I did find the smaller indicator and wiper stalks were harder to reach.

Closer to hand are the paddles, which offer simulated gearchanges. As with the Hyundai Ioniq 5 N, engine noise is projected into the cabin too. The 'gears' add a sense of engagement and 'shift' quickly and will even knock down once it hits the top of the 'rev limiter'. However, the gruff engine noise isn't convincing, and ultimately it doesn't seem a feature that will attract hardened driving enthusiasts in the way that it might on the Ioniq 5 N or even the Kia EV6 GT.

You can have a 550e in a regular trim without that yoke if you wish

The F Sport is certainly unique in many respects, with intriguing technology and good performance. The steer-by-wire system doesn't seem an obvious draw, and nor probably will the price: Lexus hasn't confirmed anything yet, but don't be surprised if it surpasses £70,000.

JACK WARRICK

TECH SPEC

LEXUS RZ 550E F SPORT

Fast and full of cutting-edge tech but not one for enthusiasts

Price £70,000 (est)
Engine Two permanent magnet synchronous motors
Power 402bhp
Torque 396lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, 4WD
Kerb weight 2180kg
0-62mph 4.4sec
Top speed 112mph
Battery 77kWh (total)
Range, economy 280 miles, na
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Polestar 2 Long Range Dual Motor, Volvo EX40 Twin Motor

TESTED 11.6.25, WOLFSBURG, GERMANY **DELIVERIES** AUTUMN

VW GOLF GTI EDITION 50

With more power and added precision, is this the sharpest GTI yet?

It's only a short drive; a quick evaluation run in a prototype. But it's long enough to confirm something important. The new Golf GTI Edition 50 isn't merely a decal-and-badge special – it's the most powerful and, arguably, the most dynamically accomplished front-wheel-drive Volkswagen yet.

This drive followed a deep dive into the hot hatch's engineering and Volkswagen's evolving development process, which now includes digital simulator tuning in partnership with German firm EDAG, backed by test track validation using a robot capable of analysing fine-grain steering response. These are relatively new tools layered on top of traditional development methods – and it shows. This isn't quite the final production model, but it's close. And based on what I've sampled, Volkswagen has every reason to be confident.

The numbers are strong but not outrageous: a revised version of the 'EA888' 2.0-litre turbo four produces 321bhp and 310lb ft – 25bhp more but the same torque as the existing Golf GTI Clubsport.

As we have come to expect from the Golf GTI through the years, the delivery is measured rather than manic. Acceleration is brisk, with the same muscular mid-range and strong top-end characteristics as in the Clubsport.

With an electromechanical locking differential (XDS) and Volkswagen's Vehicle Dynamics Manager (VDM), it puts its power to the road with impressive clarity. Traction is also improved. However, it's the chassis that steals the show.

Front-end response is markedly sharper. With 2deg of negative camber, revised suspension geometry and stiffer top suspension mounts, the Edition 50 turns in with added immediacy.

Steering is noticeably more direct, particularly in the first few degrees off-centre, and the added feedback builds confidence. Turn-in is eager, accurate and more communicative than in any recent Golf GTI.

The rear axle benefits from similarly focused changes. A new dual-attachment track rod and revised carrier geometry (similar in concept to that of the Mk7 Golf GTI) provide increased toe stability under load. There's less nervousness, greater composure.

The Edition 50 rides 5mm lower than the Clubsport. There's less roll. It feels more planted, more secure – the kind of confidence-inspiring stability that lets you carry serious speed through fast corners. It encourages commitment rather than caution.

A large part of this added poise comes from the tyres. Volkswagen has worked with Bridgestone on a GTI-specific version of the Potenza Race semi-slick, fitted to 19in forged aluminium Warmenau wheels on the more performance-focused of two Edition 50 variants. The combination reduces unsprung mass and rolling resistance, enhancing both response and cornering precision.

Backing up that claim is Volkswagen race driver Benny Leuchter's recent 7min 46.13sec lap of the full 12.94-mile Nürburgring Nordschleife – making the Edition 50 the fastest production Volkswagen ever around the circuit. It's quicker than the four-wheel-drive Golf R 20 Years and edges close to the Honda Civic Type R's front-wheel-drive benchmark.

Admittedly, I drove the Edition 50 only on smooth-surfaced test track roads. Wet-weather grip from the semi-slicks and ride comfort on broken UK Tarmac remain unanswered questions. But even in this short stint, the Edition 50 has proven that it's more than just the most powerful GTI yet – it might also be the best to drive. And, just perhaps, the very last of its kind.

GREG KABLE

TECH SPEC

VOLKSWAGEN GOLF GTI EDITION 50

Sharper, faster and more composed than any GTI before it. Fiercely capable. A fitting send-off for the petrol-engined VW hot hatch

Price £46,000 (est)
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1984cc, turbo, petrol
Power 321bhp
Torque 310lb ft
Gearbox 7-spd dual-clutch automatic, FWD
Kerb weight na
0-62mph 5.5sec
Top speed 168mph
Economy 32mpg (est)
CO$_2$, tax band 180g/km, 37% (est)
Rivals Mercedes-AMG A35, Honda Civic Type R

Edition 50 gets new steering wheel, synthetic velour and red-trimmed cabin

This is the most potent GTI to date, only 7bhp down on the Golf R

TESTER'S NOTE

In addition to the bespoke Bridgestones, the optional GTI Performance Package includes higher spring rates, a 5mm-lower ride height and a titanium exhaust system from Akrapovic. **GK**

UK VERDICTS

TESTER'S NOTE
L&K trim is best for ultimate sleeper spec, while Sportline is the most distinctive and overtly sporty trim available, with its gaping bumpers, black trim and 19in alloys – but then you can get that even on the 148bhp 1.5 TSI. **SP**

TESTED 28.6.25, MIDDLESEX **DELIVERIES** NOW

SKODA SUPERB 2.0 TSI 4x4

Ultra-practical estate nabs the regular VW Golf GTI's 261bhp engine

Family-friendly Q-cars are a dying breed, so much so that the new 261bhp, four-wheel-drive petrol version of the Skoda Superb stands all but alone. Old rivals like the Peugeot 508 PSE SW are no longer on sale, while equivalently sized, equivalently powerful estates from premium brands are considerably more expensive.

The Superb 2.0 TSI 265PS 4x4's turbocharged four-cylinder engine is taken from the latest Volkswagen Golf GTI and makes 261bhp and 295lb ft (the same power as it has in the GTI but 22lb ft more torque) for a 0-62mph time of 5.7sec. That's just 0.7sec adrift of the E450d Estate, despite the Mercedes' sizeable power and torque advantage.

The enduring 'EA888' unit remains smooth and quick here in this big barge. It's responsive and energetic and gives the Superb an athletic character that belies its size and weight. Open the throttle and it surges forward with real pace.

While it gets pretty vocal, it's never overbearing or intrusive. Sure, there's plenty of artificial noise piped into the cabin, but there's a sporting timbre to it when you're driving spiritedly.

The seven-speed dual-clutch automatic gearbox operates smoothly in most scenarios, although it suffers from some clunkiness at slower speeds. It's fun to swap gears using the paddles behind the steering wheel, even though they're rather small.

Greater feel from the pedals would help too: the throttle is a bit sensitive from standstill and the brake is long and hard to modulate in stop/start traffic.

Sportline models get Dynamic Chassis Control Plus as standard (this powertrain is also available in luxurious Laurin & Klement trim), bringing adaptive dampers that are said to offer a broader range of damping characteristics thanks to the use of separate valves for rebound and compression. Their settings change depending on your selected drive mode, or you can pick your preferred level of firmness through Individual mode.

In Comfort mode, the ride is pliant and composed, albeit with a bit of jostle at lower speeds on beaten-up roads. Swap to Sport and the car becomes more agile, hiding its 4.9-metre length well through corners. There's a bit of initial lean on turn-in, but the firmed-up dampers keep things controlled and grip levels are high.

Feedback from the steering – which is consistent, precise and weighty – is good too.

Dial things back and this Superb makes an excellent cruiser, albeit with a bit more road roar from Sportline's larger (19in) wheels.

Inside, it's still the same ultra-spacious, well-packaged and easy-to-use car that we've always admired. Sportline trim gets you racier accoutrements inside, including sports seats, a sports steering wheel and Alcantara on the dashboard and door handles. It feels upmarket and characteristically robust.

Everything is sensibly laid out; Sportline gets Alcantara, L&K has leather

The 13in touchscreen is intuitive and Skoda's user-friendly Smart Dials are a boon on the move.

Rear accommodation impresses, with generous amounts of head and leg room, and the near-700-litre boot capacity makes a mockery of the E450d Estate (615 litres) and BMW 5 Series Touring (570), never mind the C-Class and 3 Series estates.

We're big fans of this Skoda sleeper and could happily run it every day. It's not the most efficient estate (expect 21mpg for short trips around town and 33mpg on the motorway), and it does have a few foibles, but the mere fact that it exists is something to be celebrated.

SAM PHILLIPS

TECH SPEC

SKODA SUPERB 2.0 TSI 265PS 4x4 SPORTLINE ESTATE

Combines Golf GTI power and tidy handling with real comfort
★★★★☆

Price £50,065
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1984cc, turbo, petrol
Power 261bhp at 6500rpm
Torque 295lb ft at 1650-4500rpm
Gearbox 7-spd dual-clutch automatic, 4WD
Kerb weight 1668kg
0-62mph 5.7sec
Top speed 155mph
Economy 36.3mpg
CO_2, tax band 177-180g/km, 37%
Rivals BMW M340i Touring, Mercedes C300 Estate, Volkswagen Passat 1.5 TSI eHybrid

TESTED 1.7.25, WILTSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

PORSCHE 911 GT3 TOURING

Stuttgart clips the GT3's wings in a quest to make a better road car

Spot a new 911 GT3 on the road and the chances are it won't be 'just' a GT3. The track-day-going purist – or the owner with a shrewd eye on residuals – will probably have optioned the £19,500 Weissach package, with selected suspension and aero components in CFRP, plus Race-Tex upholstery, six-point harnesses and a CFRP-clad roll-cage similar to that of the GT3 RS.

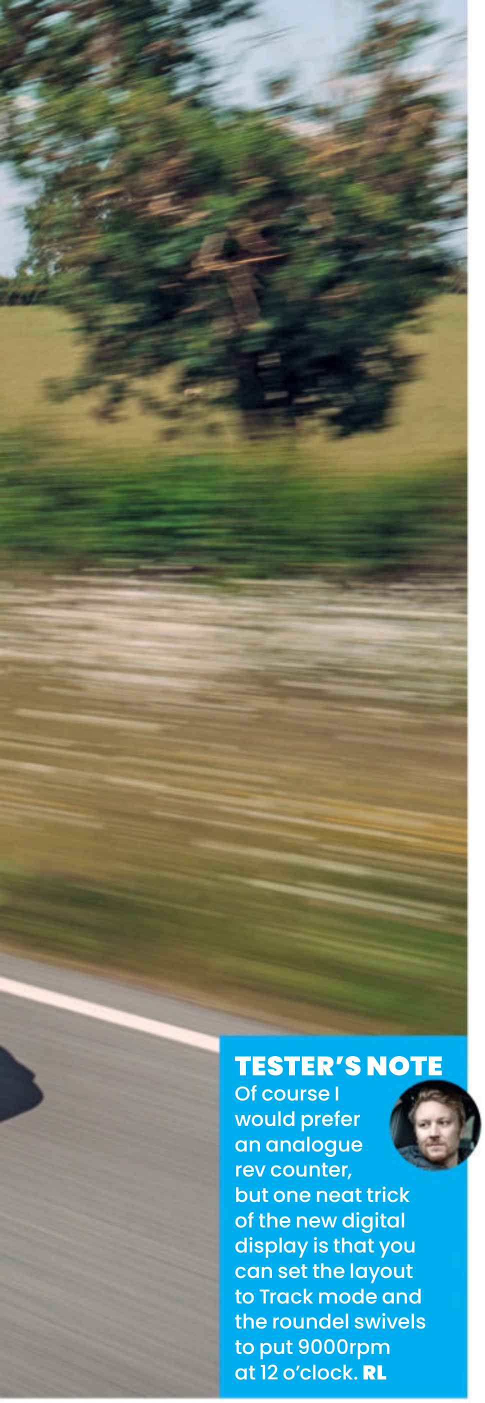
For the more reserved individual there is the Touring package, which costs nothing to have and is being offered from the start of sales for the first time. Here the car loses its famous rear wing and has a plusher cabin. It is also the Touring strain that gives us our first taste of the 992 'dot two' 911 GT3 on UK roads.

This particular GT3 Touring, fetching in Oak Green, also has a little plaque on the centre console. 'Leichtbau', it reads. This means an extra £29,225 – about the cost of an Alpine A290 – has been spent beyond the basic £158,200 on a lightweighting programme. 'Baby 911 S/T' treatment, if you like: magnesium alloy wheels that save 9kg and a lithium ion battery that saves another 4kg. Although paint hides the fact, the roof panel is also CFRP, as are the anti-roll bars and various other suspension bits (as per the Weissach pack). The door cards are lightweight, and if you fit carbon-ceramic brakes, it's possible to bring the GT3 Touring down to 1420kg or so. You have to go back to 2012 to find a lighter showroom-fresh 911 GT3.

This car isn't quite that light. It doesn't have the carbon-ceramic brakes and it has rear seats, offered for the first time in the history of the GT3. They are accessible because of new folding bucket seats that normally cost £5390 but which come with the Leichtbau pack.

As we learned in January, when we drove the updated GT3 in Germany, not a lot has changed from before in mechanical terms, although there are one or two meaningful tweaks. The contact patch is unchanged and the car's 4.0-litre flat six still spins to a heady 9000rpm, peaking at 503bhp a little before that point. New catalytic converters (there are now four in

The 911 GT3 Touring feels fast, but its power is accessible and usable



TESTER'S NOTE

Of course I would prefer an analogue rev counter, but one neat trick of the new digital display is that you can set the layout to Track mode and the roundel swivels to put 9000rpm at 12 o'clock. **RL**

Cabin is pared back but not minimalist. Leichtbau pack includes folding bucket seats

> "What a glorious thing it is to take this pin-sharp, perfectly linear motor to its limit"

Ride quality is excellent, but suspension is at its best under load at speed

total) drop torque 15lb ft to 332lb ft, but it matters not, because the final drive ratio has been shortened by 8% whether you go for the manual gearbox, which is paired with a traditional mechanical limited-slip differential, or the PDK, whose LSD is electronically controlled. Porsche has played with the spring rates, and there is a touch more suspension travel than before, as well as increased anti-dive in geometry borrowed from the RS.

How much difference does this all make on the road, rather than the track? More than you might expect. The benefit of the shorter gearing is obvious – it brings the redline into play earlier. What a glorious thing it is to take this pin-sharp and perfectly linear motor to its limit. The speed feels manageable, too, which is to say that the 911 GT3 no longer feels intimidatingly fast. When the 991-gen gave this 4.0-litre engine its debut, it felt supersonic from 7500rpm on. Literally breathtaking. The GT3 hasn't become any slower, but the progressiveness of its power delivery and that relatively modest torque means that, next to today's PHEV super-saloons and a vast number of performance EVs, it feels sensibly endowed. You can easily get a handle on its performance and get stuck into the detail of the chassis and powertrain. It's amusing and poignant to think that what always made the Mazda MX-5 such an involving, exploitable, enjoyably carefree machine now applies to the mighty 911 GT3.

Not all of this approachability is down to the powertrain. A criticism frequently levelled at the previous GT3 Touring was that Porsche hadn't given it a separate, calmer suspension tune from the regular GT3 despite their subtly different remits. This approach still applies, but it matters less now because I can't remember the old car being as pliant or obedient as this new one. The body doesn't crash, and it very seldom floats. Even when you think you've miscalculated, or failed to clock a trough or ridge? Nothing. In the context of an extremely serious performance car, the ride quality is superb, although it does, in that serious-performance-car way, only come together with load. If you're not going to properly engage with the GT3 when you get the chance, have a Carrera S instead.

The light steering is also unexpectedly uncorrupted. It doesn't hunt cambers or easily deflect, although it does seem less communicative than before, even with Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 rubber fitted. The car is utterly trustworthy, in short, although you still get that hallmark GT3 adjustability: a lift or prod of the throttle will elicit a precise change in your line, even with very little cornering force built up, and well within the limits of grip. I also like that you can now have two presets for the dampers, exhaust and ESP/traction control tune, which are configurable in the Sport and Track modes, for a quick change of character when the moment comes.

So – surprise, surprise – it's very good, this new GT3. The flat six is a little quieter than before, but the overall package is subtly but discernibly better. It remains a raucous machine even by 911 standards – road roar means the Ferrari 296 GTB and Aston's Vantage are silkier long-distance cars – but if you can live with that, fill thy boots.

RICHARD LANE

TECH SPEC

PORSCHE 911 GT3 TOURING

Still a machine you need to be in the mood for, but more usable than before and sublime on a good road

★★★★★

Price £158,200
Engine 6 cyls horizontally opposed, 3996cc, petrol
Power 503bhp at 8500rpm
Torque 332lb ft at 6250rpm
Gearbox 6-spd manual, RWD
Kerb weight 1461kg
0-62mph 3.9sec
Top speed 194mph
Economy 20.7mpg
CO_2, tax band 310g/km, 37%
Rivals Ferrari 296 GTB, Aston Martin Vantage

ROAD TESTS

AUTOCAR **ROAD TEST 5759**

AUDI RS3

Ingolstadt sharpens up its five-cylinder hyper-hatch

MODEL TESTED
AUDI RS3 SPORTBACK CARBON VORSPRUNG
Price £70,330
Power 394bhp at 5600-7000rpm
Torque 369lb ft at 2250-5600rpm
0-60mph 3.6sec
30-70mph 3.3sec
Top speed 174mph (claimed)
Average economy 24.5mpg
Touring economy 34.1mpg
CO_2 emissions 213g/km
70-0mph 42.5m (20deg C, dry)

This car was not supposed to exist. The 8Y-generation Audi RS3 was signed off based on a business case that assumed it would never make it past the base A3's mid-life facelift, because the 2.5-litre five-cylinder engine that defines this car's character couldn't be made compliant with the upcoming Euro 7 emission standards – not economically anyway.

But then Euro 7 got postponed, and it turned out that making it pass the latest Euro 6 variation was achievable with a bit of tweaking. The game was on to keep the last remaining car with a five-cylinder engine alive for a few more years. After all, despite now-astronomical pricing, the demand was still there, and it's a great halo product for Audi.

As well as the regular A3's facelift tweaks, the RS3 has gained a number of intriguing mechanical upgrades. We have never strapped the timing gear to this generation of the RS3, so let's do that now and see if the five-cylinder can go out on a high.

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★★⯪

PROS The five-cylinder lives on; torque-split device; wide arches set RS3 apart from lesser A3s
CONS All versions have dark or carbon accents, and no brightwork

As before, the RS3 is the most extreme car to sit on the Volkswagen Group's MQB platform. More commonly featuring a 1.5-litre four-cylinder engine with front-wheel drive, here it sports the long-running EA855 2.5-litre five-cylinder. There is a new catalytic converter aftertreatment to keep it legal, but that hasn't affected power and torque. Meanwhile, the exhaust flaps open earlier in the rev range for a more enticing soundtrack. Like the smaller engines, the five-cylinder is transversely mounted, which makes for quite a crowded engine bay.

Power goes, via a seven-speed dual-clutch automatic gearbox, to the front wheels in the first instance, or, if the ECUs deem it appropriate, to all four via a wet multi-plate clutch. When the third-generation RS3 was launched in 2021, it (together with the Volkswagen Golf R) introduced a significant innovation for MQB cars. Instead of a conventional rear differential, it had a clutch-based torque-split device that could send all of the rear axle's torque (up to 50% of the total) to either rear wheel, in order to overspeed the outside rear and turn the car in to corners.

Mk2 A3 was first to spawn five-pot RS

This set-up returns, albeit with different tuning. This is partly predicated on the new tyre selection. The standard rubber is now a Pirelli P Zero R. Trofeo R semi-slicks remain an option, and in any case the RS 3 is very unusual in having wider tyres at the front than at the rear.

The additional grip from the standard tyres works with a revised torque split algorithm to make the front end more keyed in and the car more adjustable through weight transfer, but less keen to oversteer purely on the power.

Naturally, the facelift version comes with some visual tweaks too. Like the standard A3, it gets the latest version of the Audi badge, which moves up slightly in the front grille. The grille itself has a different pattern and the air intakes have a slightly different shape. At the back, the diffuser becomes more elaborate, with a central light.

INTERIOR

★★★⯪☆

PROS Good number of physical controls; some material richness; sound driving position and comfortable seats; option of bucket seats
CONS New steering wheel is no improvement; fairly tight for space; standard seats lack lateral support

As the current A3 is one of Audi's older models, it finds itself between two different design philosophies. Inside, it is not exactly an Audi of the old school with outstanding materials and lots of physical controls, but neither has it adopted the radically screen-heavy approach of the latest A5 and A6.

For its class, it finds quite a healthy balance, with a slightly unusual constellation of air vents, some pleasing matt carbonfibre trim, and a useful selection of physical controls for functions such as the climate control, drive modes, mirror controls and lights.

Infotainment is covered by a 10.1in central touchscreen and a digital driver display. The former is logically laid out, with calm graphics and a good amount of configurability, but doesn't have the snappiest responses. The gauge cluster lets you choose from a number of layouts, some of which are clear and attractive. Engaging one of the sportier drive modes automatically switches it to one of the messier views, though.

Generally, the materials and build quality reach a high standard for the segment, though it's not entirely free of scratchy or gloss black plastics. Rear passengers may feel slightly like they're in second class, because their door cappings are made of hard plastic. They get their own air vents and USB ports, but space is not exactly generous – leg room is notably tighter than in a BMW 1 Series, and so is boot space.

■ 19in cross-spoke wheels were introduced on the pre-facelift Performance Edition and are now an option on the standard RS3. A more conventional Y-spoke design is available as well, but we like this throwback to the BBS wheels that were popular in the '80s and '90s.

■ More elaborate diffuser is one of the novelties for the updated RS3. It gains a few more fins and a central light. It's gloss black as standard, or carbonfibre from Carbon Black trim up. Oval exhaust tips are an Audi RS hallmark. Flaps now open at lower revs.

The front is where you really want to be. The seats and driving position are mostly standard-issue MQB, which means that you can sit quite low for a front-wheel-drive hatchback and the seats are multi-adjustable and mostly comfortable, though particularly tall drivers may wish for a little more leg room.

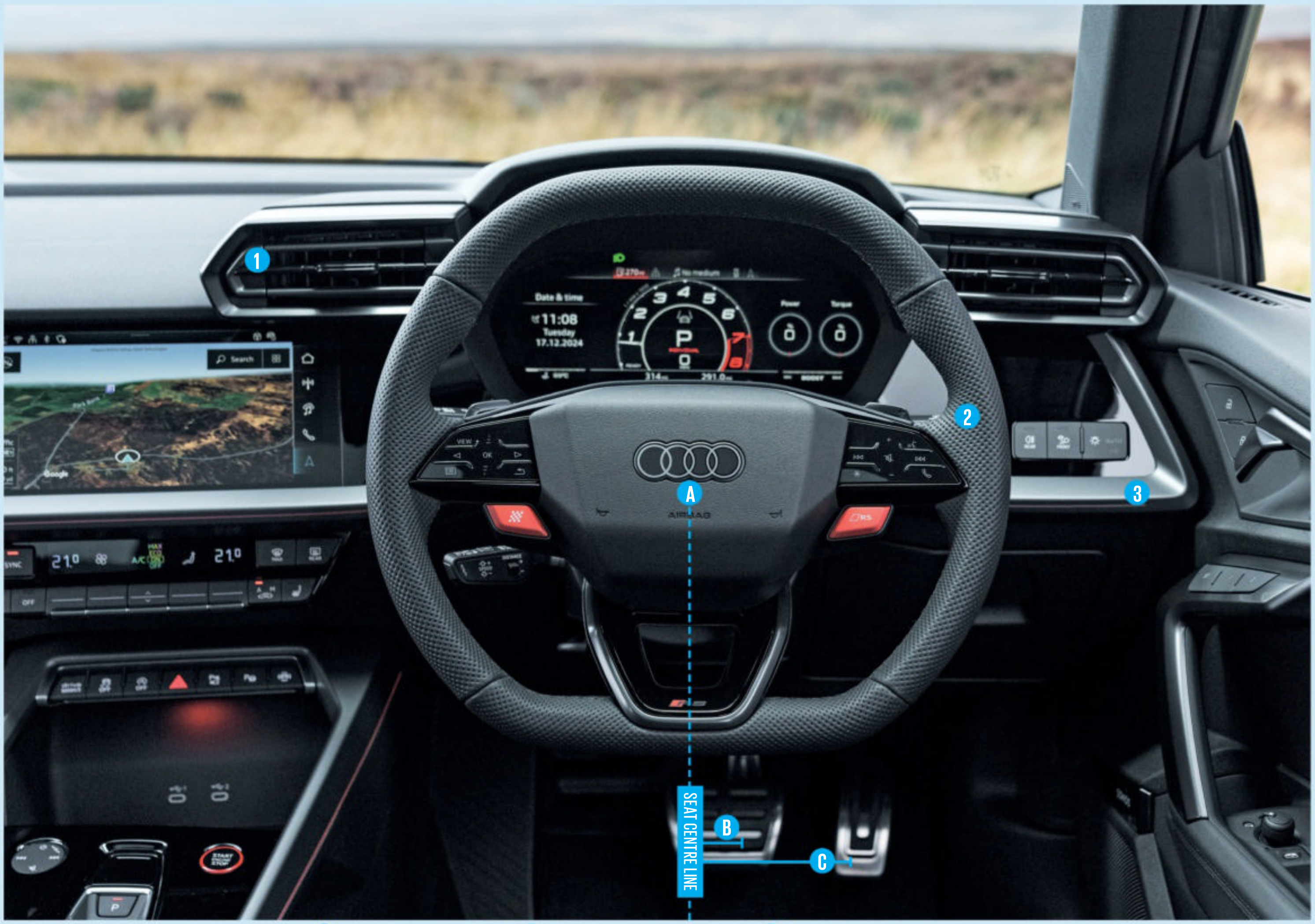
Here, there are two novelties. The first is the steering wheel, which is borrowed from the E-tron GT and is no improvement over the round, button-rich one in the pre-facelift car. With its thin rim, the new one is nice enough to hold, but the flat top and bottom are needlessly awkward, and the touch-sensitive buttons are susceptible to accidental activation. The new shortcut buttons to activate your individual drive mode and the maximum-attack RS mode are useful, at least.

The RS3 also gains the option of the 'RS bucket seats', which were introduced on the not-for-UK limited-edition Performance Edition. Although we have not had the opportunity to try them, we suspect they would be a worthwhile option if you're fairly ▸

① 'Satellite' air vents are an unusual styling feature and give the A3/RS3 more of a sense of theatre and occasion than the very minimalist interiors of more recent Audi models.

② Shortcut buttons for the drive modes are a nice touch, but otherwise the steering wheel is no improvement, with an odd shape and buttons that can be activated inadvertently.

③ Materials are generally pleasing for a C-segment hatchback, with matt carbonfibre on the dashboard and plenty of soft-touch surfaces. This is a £70,000 hatchback, though.



WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT Ⓐ Steering offset 0mm Ⓑ Brake offset 60mm right Ⓒ Accelerator offset 185mm right. Driving position is much the same as in any MQB car: you can get low and the pedal placement is conventional, but some more steering column reach wouldn't go amiss.

◂ slim and are looking to use your RS3 on track, since some testers found themselves sliding around in the standard seats.

PERFORMANCE

★★★★⯪

PROS Mighty charismatic engine; super-saloon-fast; strong, fade-free braking in dry and wet
CONS Dual-clutch automatic gearbox is neither the fastest nor the smoothest

In an era of hybrids and EVs, 1619kg (as tested) is looking relatively svelte by comparison. In fact, despite its physically larger engine, the RS3 is very slightly lighter than the Mercedes-AMG A45 S we weighed in 2020 (1661kg). Add in 394bhp, sticky tyres and an effective four-wheel drive system, and it's no surprise the RS3 is searingly quick in a straight line.

When you engage launch control, the electronics ensure there is just enough clutch and wheel slip to get off the line cleanly, after which the seven-speed dual-clutch automatic punches through the gears. All of this is accompanied by the five-cylinder's soulful howl.

In the dry, it got away from the line faster than the A45 did in the damp, but didn't prove quite as rapid through the gears as the AMG. Even so, this is still a hot hatch that out-accelerates a V8 Lexus RC F. It also proved a good deal quicker than the previous-generation RS3 we tested in 2017, despite the same power output and gear ratios. The current one does have slightly more torque and a wider power band.

More significant than the raw performance, however, is that this five-cylinder must be one of the last great engines. Audi keeping it alive for another generation is effectively a service to the world. It's relatively subtle at low revs and when pootling around, but as soon as you get more than 3000rpm on the tacho, it unleashes its full vocal range – a soundtrack that is unique in new cars. Indeed, it needs a few revs before it starts to give its best, which is actually quite refreshing when the default is instant electric torque fill.

Apart from that, it's extremely characterful. Aside from the core sound, this engine emits all sorts of secondary buzzes and growls – the sort of rough edges that you would expect to be tuned out in modern engines and would certainly never be tuned into any digitally augmented sound but make it all the more special.

We suspect this transverse application of the seven-speed dual-clutch gearbox must be at the top end of the power and torque it can handle. It clearly gets the job done but can behave in a slightly unusual way. At low loads, it seems to slip the clutch and slur gearchanges like an old-school torque-converter auto, and yet it's not always perfectly smooth. Even at speed, the gearchanges aren't as crisp as you might expect from a dual-clutch.

Despite not being fitted with the optional carbon-ceramic brakes (£4590), our RS3 test car displayed short stopping distances, both in the dry and the wet, which is impressive given the performance-oriented tyres.

HANDLING & STABILITY

★★★★☆

PROS Agile and engaging balance on the road; decent steering feel and progression
CONS Big turning circle

The torque-split device that has been appearing on the rear axle of MQB cars over the past few years has been excellent at conjuring extra agility and adjustability in any car it is fitted to. The RS3 was no exception when the Mk3 was launched a few years ago. It seems odd, then, that this updated version dials up the grip and supposedly dials down the power oversteer.

There is no need for concern, though: the RS3 still feels alive in a way that you don't necessarily expect from a transverse-engined four-wheel-drive hatchback. The nose-heavy balance isn't really an issue on the road. Instead it's neutralised by a combination of the unusual tyre set-up (wider at the front than at the rear), the variable-ratio steering and the torque vectoring – both by braking and using the rear torque splitter.

As a result, this RS3 turns in keenly, then pivots into corners off the power, and feels like it's rotating on the throttle. It never feels like a well-balanced rear-drive car that can gracefully tighten its line on the throttle or exit corners with a sliver of oversteer, but it does give it a feeling of agility that's really satisfying. Although grip levels are huge, you don't need to drive at maximum attack for the RS3 to feel alive, either. There's always something happening.

The steering feels odd at first, because there are less than two full rotations of the wheel between locks. This is partly due to there just not being all that much angle available – blame the long engine mounted transversely and the wide front tyres – and the rack having a variable ratio. It's one of the better of its kind, with reasonable feedback and relatively gentle responses off-centre that quicken as you add more input. We can't help wondering if a conventional rack might have felt more natural, though.

TRACK NOTES

★★★★½

PROS Outstandingly exploitable 4WD system

CONS Front-heavy balance shows when pushing hard

Trying to push beyond that initial sense of rotation is something best left for the track, because it can feel quite snappy on a dry road. When you do have the space, however, the RS3 can be rapturously good fun, letting you live out your Walter Röhrl fantasies without requiring the same level of talent and skill.

When trying to scribe a neat and tidy line around a dry track, you can just about feel the heavy front end: it demands a bit of patience. When not driving for time, though, it can be sent into easy four-wheel drifts at will. Even ignoring the Torque Rear mode, booting it out of second-gear corners will swing the back wide, so long as the corner isn't so slow that it dips the engine out of the power band.

More satisfying is how responsive the car is to being flicked into faster bends off the throttle, and you can then power through with a bit of yaw and all four wheels over-rotating. A wet track allows you to indulge in much the same sensations, albeit at lower speeds.

COMFORT & ISOLATION

★★★☆☆

PROS Supple ride most of the time; comfortable seats

CONS Suspension struggles with poor road surfaces; more NVH than you might expect

Away from a smooth road or track, you can start to run into the limitations of this platform. As a top-rung Carbon Vorsprung model, our test car was fitted with adaptive dampers. Unlike on other MQB cars, where the dampers have 15 settings, in the RS3 they have a mere three. Even so, we only found the softest one truly usable on the road. They seem to lack some bandwidth: most of the time the suspension feels quite supple, but it can fall apart when the road surface deteriorates. It feels brittle over potholes and corrugations – something we have found in many MQB cars with big wheels. Meanwhile, large-amplitude bumps expose a shortage of travel, and the ride gets excitable.

Clearly, the RS3's performance and handling introduce a few compromises to the comfort. Although an equipment issue meant we weren't able to take our usual decibel readings, the RS3 is clearly noisier than a standard A3 on the motorway, with some general vibrations from the stiffer bushings and offbeat engine. None of this is unbearable, or even unusual for what is quite a serious performance car.

BUYING & OWNING

★★★☆☆

PROS Not especially thirsty at a cruise; should hold its value

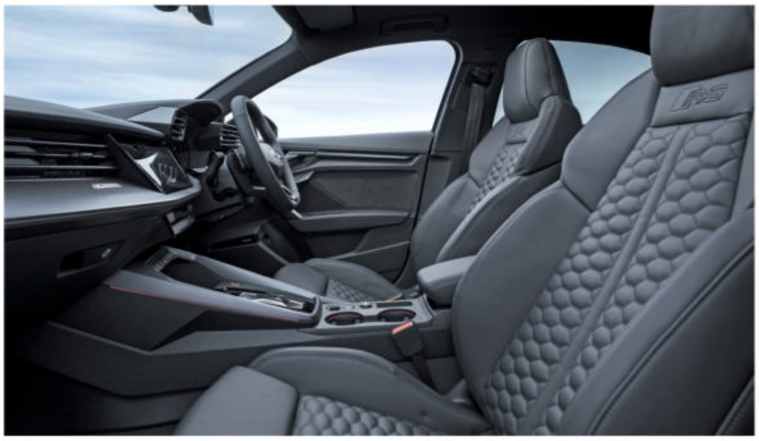
CONS Very expensive; thirsty when extended

Audi wants £70,330 for an RS3 in Carbon Vorsprung trim, and that's before you tick the boxes for the bucket seats and the carbon-ceramic brakes. That's an enormous amount of money for something that could uncharitably be referred to as a posh Golf. If you're willing to forgo the adaptive dampers and the carbonfibre trim, you could just stick with the entry-level car at a slightly more palatable £62,120.

But then the RS3 arguably only has one direct rival left, in the form of the Mercedes-AMG A45, which costs around the same. The Honda Civic Type R has recently been discontinued, and the Toyota GR Yaris is sold out. Meanwhile, cars like the Volkswagen Golf R and BMW M135 play in a lower league. BMW's M2 and M340i Touring are similar money but not quite the same sort of proposition.

Although it's not formally a limited model, Audi doesn't churn out RS3s like it does less CO_2-heavy models, so residuals should remain strong.

With its heavily turbocharged engine, the RS3's fuel economy depends completely on driving style. It's capable of MPGs in the mid-30s on a motorway cruise, but those plunge very deeply when you use all of the performance. At 55 litres, the fuel tank isn't excessively large, either, and the engine demands 98-octane petrol for full performance. ▸



FRONT Leg room 1110mm, head room 985mm. Front seats are mostly comfortable but lack some lateral support, given the RS3's lateral grip.

REAR Leg room 680mm, head room 925mm. Rear accommodation is as on a standard A3. Both a BMW 1 Series and Mercedes A-Class are roomier.

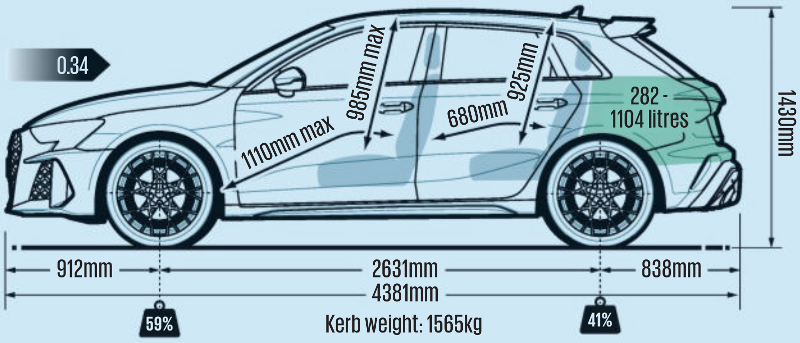
BOOT Length 775-1530mm, width 1000-1200mm, height 455-670mm. Boot is 98 litres smaller than on a regular A3, because of the complex rear diff.

"Audi keeping the five-cylinder alive is a service to the world"

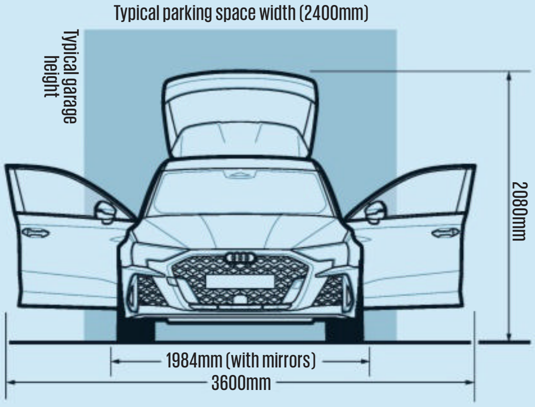
TEST RESULTS

DIMENSIONS

Length 4381mm **Width** 1984mm/1851mm (with/without mirrors) **Height** 1430mm **Door span** 3600mm **Max height to open bootlid** 2080mm

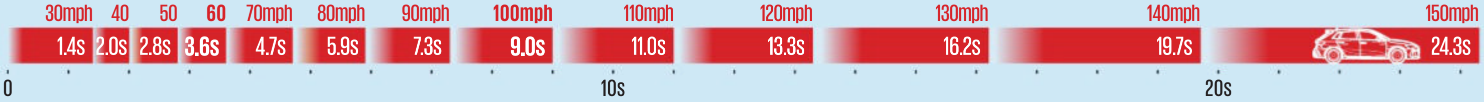

0.34
985mm max
925mm
1110mm max
680mm
282 - 1104 litres
1430mm
912mm
2631mm
838mm
4381mm
59%
41%
Kerb weight: 1565kg

PARKING

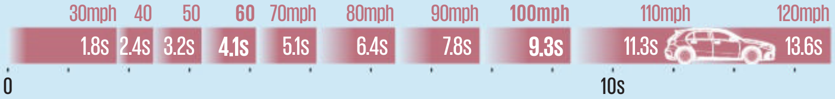

Typical parking space width (2400mm)
Typical garage height
2080mm
1984mm (with mirrors)
3600mm

ACCELERATION

Test conditions 20deg C, dry
Standing quarter mile 12.1sec at 115.3mph **Standing km** 22.2sec at 146mph **30-70mph** 3.3sec **30-70mph in fourth** 7.2sec **0-62mph** 3.8sec

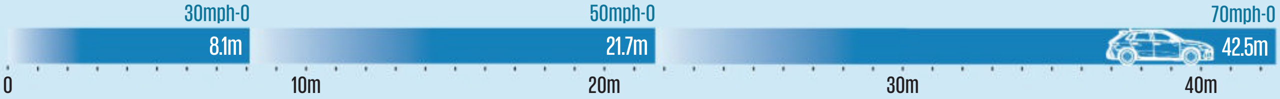


Mercedes-AMG A45 S 4Matic+ Plus (2020, 12deg C, damp, mile straight partially unavailable)
Standing quarter mile na **Standing km** na **30-70mph** 3.3sec **30-70mph in fourth** 6.2sec

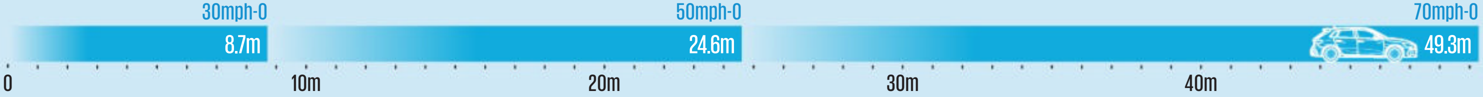


BRAKING

Dry 60-0mph 2.34sec



Wet 60-0mph 2.78sec

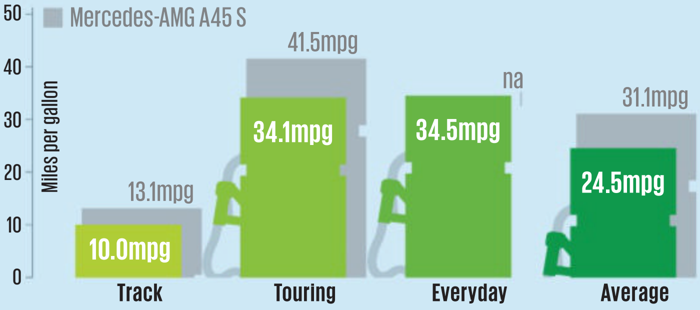


ACCELERATION IN GEAR

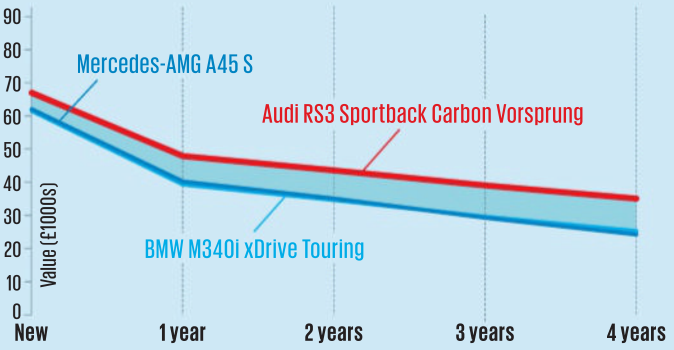
mph	Time (sec) 2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th
20-40	1.7	3.6				
30-50	1.5	2.3	4.2			
40-60	1.7	2.1	3.2	5.4		
50-70		2.2	3.0	4.2	6.7	10.5
60-80		2.3	3.2	4.0	5.5	9.0
70-90		2.6	3.3	4.3	5.4	7.7
80-100			3.5	4.6	5.9	7.6
90-110			3.8	4.9	6.6	8.4
100-120			4.3	5.3	7.1	
110-130				5.8		

RUNNING EFFICIENCY

WLTP 30.1mpg (combined) **Test range** 296/413/417 miles (average/touring/everyday)

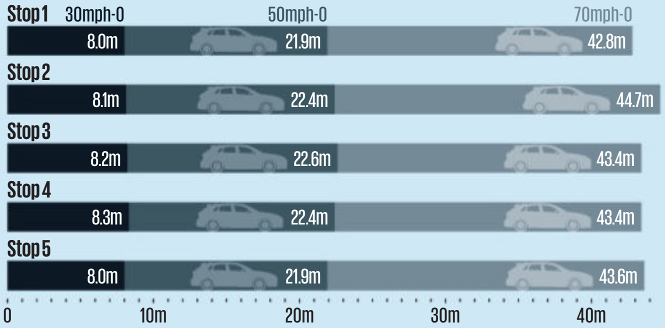


DEPRECIATION



BRAKING ENDURANCE

Fade variance 70-0m – stop 1 vs stop 5: 0.8m



PETER LIDDIARD

THE SMALL PRINT Power-to-weight and torque-to-weight figures are calculated using manufacturer's claimed kerb weight. Running efficiency is tested on a closed test track; 'touring' is representative of UK motorway driving, 'everyday' of intra-urban driving. Acceleration, braking and cabin noise are measured on reference surfaces, for cabin noise using a handheld decibel meter. Charging equipment may vary, but charger power always exceeds the advertised peak draw of the test car, unless stated. Second-row leg room is typical, measured behind a driver's seat set for 1000mm of leg room. © 2025, Haymarket Media Group Ltd. Test results may not be reproduced without editor's written permission.

VERDICT

Uber-A3 refuses to be defined just by its engine

★★★★☆

Audi's five-cylinder may be one of the last truly great engines in a relatively mass-market car. It's powerful, sure, but the character of its sound and power delivery make it truly special. Its theatre would make the RS3 recommendable all by itself.

Some Audis of the past might have stopped there, but in this latest evolution the RS3 has some serious handling chops. It relies on its exotic differential, clever electronics and an unusual tyre set-up rather than natural balance, but that makes it no less beguiling to drive on road or track. It's almost as easy to live with as a regular A3 too.

At its sky-high price point, there are quite a few tempting alternatives, some of which offer more comfort, but none has quite the same blend of a spectacular engine and all-wheel-drive handling in a fairly compact model. A one-of-a kind car.

TESTERS' NOTES

ILLYA VERPRAET
Some have derided Audi's decision to fit wider tyres at the front as fighting the platform's innate lack of balance – cheating, effectively. But how is it different from fitting wider tyres at the back of any other car? It's unusual but it works.

MATT SAUNDERS
The interior door release in the back is exactly the same part as in the front, except for the black switch instead of a lock/unlock button. It's a clever bit of cost-saving with no real downside.

FACELIFT FIXES

- For 15 years of RS3, do a special edition with the 401bhp of the Performance Edition, the bucket seats, carbon-ceramic brakes and some trick manually adjustable passive dampers, like on the RS6 GT and RS4 25 Years.

MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

AUDI RS3 SPORTBACK CARBON VORSPRUNG

On-the-road price £70,330
Price as tested £70,330
Value after 3yrs/36k miles £39,025
Contract hire £973 pcm (£5838 deposit + 36 months/30,000 miles)
Typical PCP £899 pcm (£10,600 deposit + 36 months/30,000 miles, £41,227 final payment)
Insurance group 39

FITTED EQUIPMENT

Standard Keyless entry, matrix LED headlights, adaptive dampers, openable panoramic roof, ACC
Also available Python yellow paint £595, RS bucket seats £2000, RS carbon-ceramic brakes £4590

ENGINE

Installation Front, transverse, 4WD
Type 5 cyls in line, 2480cc, turbocharged, petrol
Power 394bhp at 5600-7000rpm
Torque 369lb ft at 2250-5600rpm
Redline 7000rpm
Specific output 159bhp per litre
Power to weight 252bhp per tonne
Torque to weight 236lb ft per tonne

GEARBOX

Type 7-spd dual-clutch automatic
Ratios/mph per 1000rpm
1st 3.56/5.2 **2nd** 2.53/8.6 **3rd** 1.68/13 **4th** 1.02/18.1 **5th** 0.79/23.5 **6th** 0.77/28.4 **7th** 0.64/34.3
Final drive ratio 4.06:1 (1st, 4th, 5th), 3.45:1 (2nd, 3rd, 6th, 7th) **rpm in top gear at 70/80mph** 2041/2333

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Steel monocoque
Weight/as tested 1565kg/1619kg
Weight distribution (f/r) 59%/41%
Drag coefficient 0.34
Wheels 9.0Jx19in (f), 8.0Jx19in (r)
Tyres 265/30 ZR19 93Y (f), 245/35 ZR19 93Y (r), Pirelli P Zero R R1
Spare None (mobility kit)
Fuel tank 55 litres (under rear seats, filler on offside rear wing)

SUSPENSION & STEERING

Front MacPherson struts, coil springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar **Rear** Multi-link, coil springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar
Steering EPAS, variable-ratio rack and pinion; 1.8 turns lock to lock; 12.0m turning circle

BRAKES

Front 375mm ventilated discs, six-piston calipers **Rear** 310mm ventilated discs, one-piston calipers

SAFETY

Euro NCAP rating 5 stars (2020)
Adult occupant 89%, child occupant 81%, vulnerable road users 68%, safety assist 73%

EMISSIONS & TAX

CO_2 213g/km
BIK at 20/40% pcm £408/£816

RANKING RIVALS

1

2

4

5

6

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	HYUNDAI IONIQ 5 N	**BMW M340i XDRIVE TOURING**	AUDI RS3 SPORTBACK CARBON VORSPRUNG	**MERCEDES-AMG A45 S 4MATIC+**	**FORD MUSTANG GT**	**VOLKSWAGEN GOLF R**
	Electric and a size bigger than the RS3, but not so different in its high-tech approach. The way forward for EVs.	Longitudinally engined BMW is a more natural driver's car. Full-fat M3 is a lot more expensive still.		Better steering and balance make this a very serious driver's car, but the engine isn't as memorable.	A very different route to a truly great engine. About as old-school as it gets and all the better for it. Avoid the auto 'box.	This and the Cupra Leon have much of the same chassis tech for less money, but you don't get that engine.
	★★★★★	★★★★⯪		★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Price	£65,010	£63,880		£65,395	£58,470	£45,660
Power, torque	641bhp, 568lb ft	369bhp, 369lb ft		416bhp, 369lb ft	440bhp, 398lb ft	328bhp, 310lb ft
0-62mph, top speed	3.4sec, 161mph	4.6sec, 155mph		3.9sec, 168mph	5.3sec, 155mph	4.6sec, 168mph
CO_2, economy	0g/km, 2.9mpkWh	193g/km, 32.8mpg		208g/km, 30.8mpg	274g/km, 23.5mpg	193g/km, 33.2mpg

AUTOCAR **ROAD TEST 5760**

BMW iX

Big BMW was at the vanguard of luxo-EVs back in 2022. Can it keep up?

Despite BMW having gone on to produce bigger, better-selling and longer-range EVs, there is still plenty of love for its first mass-produced one, the i3 – and no small amount of lament that Munich has largely moved away from the i3's avant-garde construction.

Arguably the i3's closest descendant in the current BMW range is the iX, which has just received a major model-year update.

Until the 'Neue Klasse' iX3 arrives, all other electric BMWs are twinned with a piston-powered version, sharing the same platform, body and packaging. The iX is the only stand-alone EV, which lets it go a little bit off-menu. Instead of just using steel and aluminium, it has a carbonfibre-reinforced plastic (CFRP) passenger cell, and because the bonnet doesn't have to house an engine, it can be shorter and leave more of the car's considerable length for passengers.

That all sounds quite i3, doesn't it? With a bit of imagination, the iX looks like an i3 too, albeit a puffed-up one. Those looks caused a bit of a stir when the iX was launched in 2022, but its qualities as a luxury EV were beyond doubt. Three years later, BMW's flagship has been updated with more range but largely unaltered styling. Can it still keep up? We've got the longest-range iX xDrive60 to find out.

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★★☆

PROS Lightweight construction; large battery packs; big upgrade for the entry-level car
CONS Not actually lightweight; divisive styling

The iX, which has its own chassis codename of I20 (no relation to the small Hyundai), doesn't share its structure with any other BMW. Instead it uses an aluminium spaceframe that supports an inner CFRP structure, and a body made out of a combination of aluminium, composite plastic and CFRP. Although it's different from the CLAR platform of other BMWs, it is very compatible, which lets BMW build the iX on the same production line in Dingolfing, Germany, as the 4 through 8 Series.

None of these high-tech lightweight materials stops this big SUV from being heavy, however. Our test car, which was optioned with the air suspension and four-wheel steering, tipped the scales at 2637kg, which is more than the Polestar 3 Dual Motor and, surprisingly, more than the pre-facelift iX xDrive50 we weighed (2593kg).

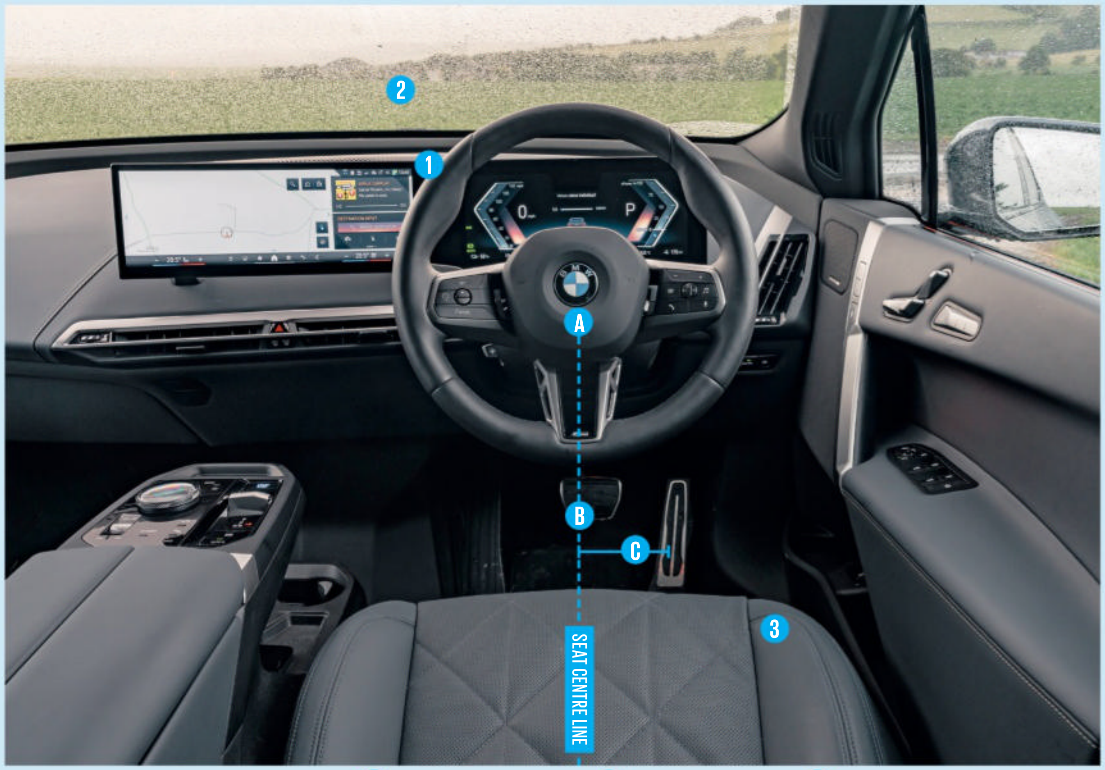
A quick glance at the spec sheet would suggest this is a result of a bigger battery, but further investigation reveals this to be unlikely. The biggest news for the updated iX is indeed the increased

MODEL TESTED
BMW iX XDRIVE60 M SPORT
Price £93,205
Power 536bhp
Torque 564lb ft
0-60mph 4.2sec
30-70mph 3.3sec
Top speed 124mph (claimed)
70-0mph 46.2m (18deg C, dry)
Range 314/295/404 miles (average/touring/everyday)
Economy 2.9/2.7/3.7mpkWh (average/touring/everyday)
Weighted average charging rate 142kW

① M Sport versions (likely to be the most popular) lose the quirky hexagonal steering wheel in favour of a round one. Matt buttons are an improvement.

② The windscreen is laminated and has a coating that filters infrared and UV light. It looks brownish from the inside and blue from the outside, and works really well.

③ The seat and steering wheel motor out of the way when you open the door. You can turn off this function for the seat, but not the wheel. It's slow and unhelpful.



WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT Ⓐ Steering offset 0mm Ⓑ Brake offset 0mm Ⓒ Accelerator offset 150mm right. Most BMWs have offset pedals, but not the iX. Tall driving position is comfortable and widely adjustable.

range, but this is achieved by a few different means.

The entry-level iX xDrive45 does receive a substantially larger battery pack: usable capacity has grown by 23.8kWh to 94.8kWh, giving it a significant 110-mile boost in range (to 374 miles) over the old xDrive40. It also gains more powerful motors (every iX has dual motors and four-wheel drive), by 80bhp for a total of 402bhp.

The next step up is the xDrive60, which gains 3.9kWh of usable capacity over the old xDrive50. However, total capacity remains almost the same, at 111.8kWh. So, as well as the 'advancements in battery cell technology' that BMW claims, the safety buffer has been reduced slightly. In addition, the inverter and motors have been made more efficient, and the latter also get more power, for a total of 536bhp. The M70 range-topper is effectively a version of the 60 with more power (650bhp) and less range (366 miles).

INTERIOR

★★★★☆

PROS Distinctive lounge ambience; perceived quality; comfort; space
CONS User interface can frustrate

The iX was the first to adopt the interior style that's now common across most BMWs, with few buttons and a wide curved screen. We generally don't find it an improvement over the last-generation cabins, because the dash can look quite sparse, the climate control is a stretch and the menu structures are quite convoluted.

The Operating System 8.5, as BMW calls the software, introduces some useful improvements over version 8.0, with more shortcuts and a more configurable home screen. Certain settings are still hard to find and take too many taps and swipes to access, though. BMW's built-in navigation is generally excellent, even if the EV route planner takes a bit of setting up if you don't want it to send you to unreliable charging networks.

This high-tech concept car feel suits the airy, lounge-like iX better than, say, a 3 Series. Where the perceived quality in other recent BMWs has taken a turn for the worse, the iX still feels like the £100,000 car that our test subject is.

Although BMW still offers a couple of funky upholstery options with unusual fabrics and colours, our car had more conventional grey leather inside. It feels soft, smooth and high-quality, and covers almost every surface you might touch. Details like the fabric on the front of the door panels and the reasonably convincing metal-effect accents add some visual interest.

The first thing you notice when you climb aboard, however, are the seats. They are broad, soft and fairly high-set – not what you expect from a BMW, but then the iX isn't a typical BMW. Again, it suits this car, and the seats are very comfortable indeed. The seats and steering column have a wide range of adjustment, although they're not quite as sophisticated as BMW's comfort seats from 10 years ago. It's also annoying that you have to go into the touchscreen (via a physical shortcut button) to adjust the lumbar and lateral support.

As you would expect from a car this big, rear-seat space is very generous, and because the bench is set relatively high, you don't have the knees-up seating position of many EVs. The boot is a good size, if not as big as in an X5, since the floor is quite high to clear the battery pack and the rear drive motor. ▸

■ The facelifted iX swaps the quasi-triangular faux air intakes for more conventional air curtains. The 'grille', which hides various sensors, has a less intricate pattern.

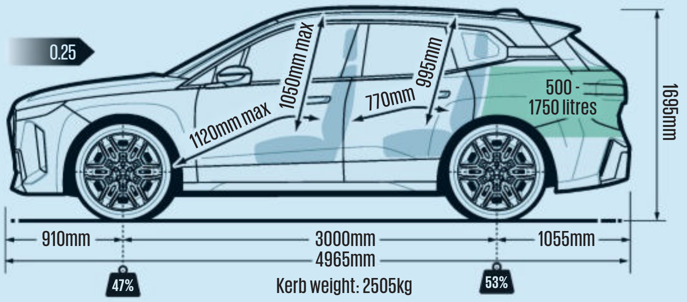
■ There's a slot at the front of the centre console for your phone, where you can still see it. It's open at the bottom, so you can connect a charge lead. A wireless charger sits below.

PHOTOGRAPHY MAX EDLESTON

TEST RESULTS

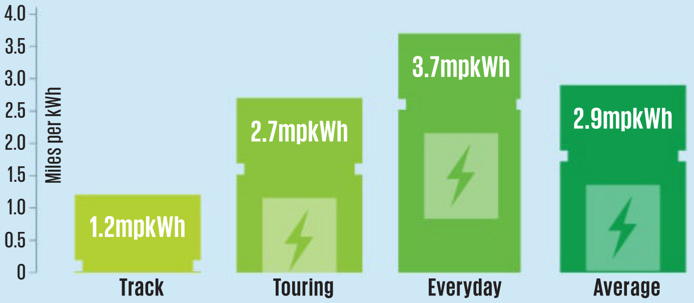
DIMENSIONS

Length 4965mm **Width** 2203mm/1970mm (with/without mirrors) **Height** 1695mm **Door span** 3900mm **Max height to open bootlid** 2220mm



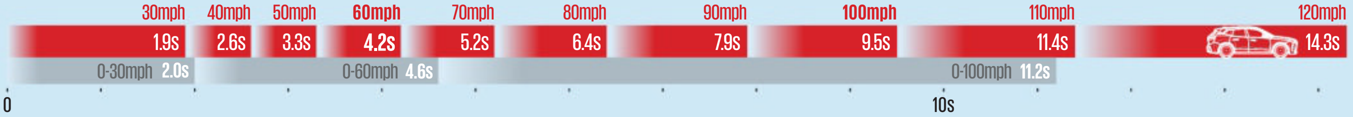
RUNNING EFFICIENCY

WLTP 401 miles, 3.2mpkWh (combined) **Test range** 314/295/404 miles (average/touring/everyday)



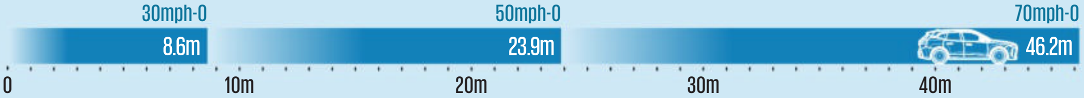
ACCELERATION

Test conditions 18deg C, dry
Standing quarter mile 12.6sec at 114.9mph **Standing km** 23.5sec at 124.2mph **30-70mph** 3.3sec **50-80mph** 3.1sec **0-62mph** 4.4sec

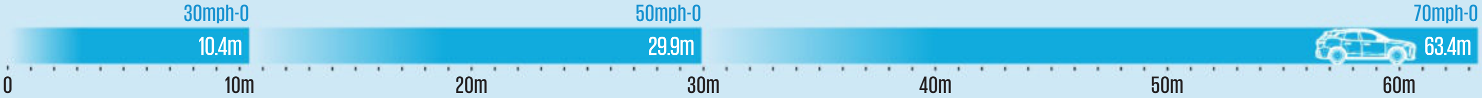


BRAKING

Dry 60-0mph 2.57sec

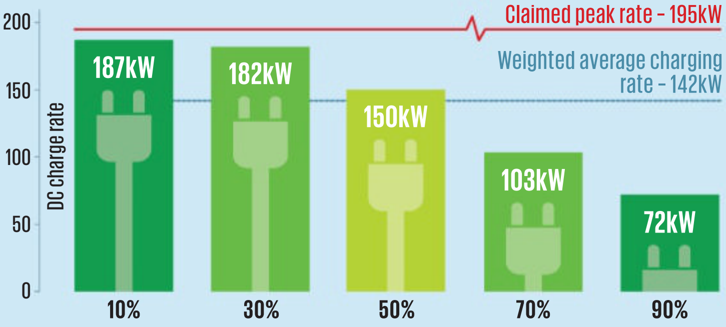


Wet 60-0mph 3.60sec



RAPID-CHARGING PERFORMANCE

Charging port location Driver's side rear wing **Charger used** 300kW, Alpitronic Hypercharger HYC300 **AC charging** 11kW (22kW optional)



MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

BMW iX XDRIVE60 M SPORT

On-the-road price £93,205
Price as tested £110,850
Value after 3yrs/36k miles £40,200
Insurance group 50A

MOTORS & BATTERY

Installation Front and rear, transverse, 4WD **Type** PMSM **Power** 536bhp total; 255bhp at 8000rpm (f); 308bhp at 8000rpm (r) **Torque** 564lb ft total; 269lb ft at 0-5000rpm (f); 295lb ft at 0-5500rpm (r) **Battery** 111.8/109.1kWh (total/usable), NMC **Power to weight** 214bhp per tonne **Torque to weight** 225lb ft per tonne

GEARBOX

Type 1-spd reduction gear
Reduction ratio 8.77:1 (f), 11.12:1 (r)
mph per 1000rpm 10.4 (f), 8.2 (r)

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Aluminium spaceframe with CFRP sections **Weight/as tested** 2505kg/2637kg **Wheels** 10.0Jx22in **Tyres** 275/40 R22 107 Y XL, Hankook iON SUV ★

SUSPENSION, STEERING & BRAKING

Front Double wishbones, air springs, anti-roll bar **Rear** Multi-link, air springs, anti-roll bar **Steering** EPAS, variable-ratio rack and pinion, plus rear-axle steering; 2.5 turns lock to lock; 9.3m turning circle **Brakes** 348mm ventilated discs (f), 345mm ventilated discs (r)

> "To top it off, this is a beautifully quiet car at a motorway cruise"

PETER LIDDIARD

THE SMALL PRINT Power-to-weight and torque-to-weight figures are calculated using manufacturer's claimed kerb weight. Running efficiency is tested on a closed test track; 'touring' is representative of UK motorway driving, 'everyday' of intra-urban driving. Acceleration, braking and cabin noise are measured on reference surfaces, for cabin noise using a handheld decibel meter. Charging equipment may vary, but charger power always exceeds the advertised peak draw of the test car, unless stated. Second-row leg room is typical, measured behind a driver's seat set for 1000mm of leg room. © 2025, Haymarket Media Group Ltd. Test results may not be reproduced without editor's written permission.

PERFORMANCE

★★★★☆

PROS Fast; progressive controls
CONS Braking performance

For something that doesn't have a performance badge, and is perhaps BMW's waftiest car (we will get to that in a minute), the iX 60 doesn't half get out of its own way. Despite gaining some weight compared with its predecessor and only 20bhp to offset the kilos, it reached 60mph 0.2sec faster than that car.

Braking – in the dry and especially in the wet – was less impressive, with our sixth stop from 70mph also taking a few metres longer than the first. The iX pulled up in a controlled fashion, but the Polestar 3 needed a notably shorter distance.

The calibration of the accelerator and brake feel is outstanding, however. Powerful EVs can suffer from slightly jumpy accelerator response, as 500bhp gets mapped on the same pedal arc that used to span only 200bhp, but not here. It's as progressive as you would like, but if you mat the pedal, it still gives you full power even if you're in the standard drive mode. The by-wire brake pedal also has just the right balance of squish and resistance for smooth limo-driver stops.

As with all BMWs, you can flick between D and B on the gear selector. B gives you proper one-pedal driving, whereas D can be configured on the screen to be adaptive or give you one of three regen strengths. They're all progressive, but we just miss a freewheeling mode.

RIDE & HANDLING

★★★★★

PROS Ride, isolation and handling are all near-faultless
CONS Much of the equipment that makes it so is optional

BMW mentions retuned springs and dampers, and a new hydraulic rear-axle support bearing. Recent BMWs (and Minis) have been afflicted with needlessly rigid suspension, but thankfully the iX has been spared. The iX remains an exceptionally soothing car to drive. It just ticks all the boxes in that respect. We have already mentioned the soft yet supportive seats, and that feeling is matched by the suspension.

As standard, the iX 45 and 60 only have air springs on the rear for self-levelling – a set-up we have not had the chance to try yet. On the evidence of our test car, the optional two-axle air adaptive suspension is well worth it. It all but eliminates the pitching and head toss that's common with tall EVs, without feeling wallowy or floaty. It gets the balance just right, and despite rolling on 22in rims, wheel control is good too, with none of the brittleness observed in a Range Rover or Mercedes-Benz EQS SUV.

To top it off, this is a beautifully quiet car at a motorway cruise, although we suspect this is again helped by our test car's optional equipment – in this case the acoustic glass (part of the £1650 Comfort Pack).

It's doubly impressive, then, that the iX doesn't seem to sacrifice any handling for this class-leading comfort. Sure, it can't completely hide its weight, and even in the firmer suspension mode there are always some body movements when you push it hard through corners, but it never feels particularly cumbersome or imprecise.

The four-wheel steering (again, optional) is a model of how such systems should be tuned. At 2.5 turns lock to lock, the steering isn't especially high-geared overall, feeling nicely calm around the dead-ahead, yet not requiring excessive arm-twirling to thread this behemoth around a tight car park. The oily-slick medium weight is very satisfying too.

The iX also behaves predictably, even when pushed to the limit on Horiba MIRA's dry and wet handling tracks, with a clear sense that there's more power going to the rear wheels than the front.

BUYING & OWNING

★★★★☆

PROS Competitively priced; strong range
CONS Efficiency and charging are only okay

With a starting price of £75,405 for the xDrive45, and £93,205 for the xDrive60 (which also requires an upgrade to M Sport trim), the iX evidently isn't cheap. However, the Audi Q6 E-tron Quattro and Mercedes-Benz EQE SUV 500 4Matic, which have similar performance and range to the 45, are no cheaper (quite to the contrary in the case of the Mercedes). The 60 far surpasses those rivals for range. That said, a Polestar 3 is in the same ballpark for range, and undercuts the BMW significantly.

Efficiency, in perfect conditions, was decent if unremarkable at 2.9mpkWh, giving a real-world range of 314 miles. DC rapid charging at up to 195kW was very good when the iX was launched, but is only middling today, with the car soon throttling back to 150kW. AC charging is up to 11kW as standard, or 22kW on three-phase if you have the optional Technology Pack. ▸

VERDICT

Took the luxury EV to new heights in 2022 and nobody has caught up yet. Still great

★★★★⯪

The world of EVs moves fast, and mercilessly leaves the unwary behind. But despite only minor improvements compared with the original, the iX is still unsurpassed as a luxury electric SUV.

In iX 60 spec with all the toys you want, it breaks the £100,000 barrier, but decent efficiency and a huge battery give it more range than rivals. The cheaper iX 45 is now worth considering too.

Fundamentally, its blend of comfort, intuitive controls, engaging handling and a convincing luxury cabin still make this big BMW a deeply impressive and enjoyable all-rounder.

RIVALS

1 **BMW iX**

PORSCHE MACAN 4S
From £76,900
★★★★☆

POLESTAR 3 LRDM
From £75,910
★★★★☆

MERC EQE 500 SUV
From £90,570
★★★★☆

AUTOCAR PODCAST

MY WEEK IN CARS

Steve Cropley

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ILLYA VERPRAET

Testing, testing

This driving experience has a surprising amount in common with a Skoda's

We try to keep our group tests somewhat relevant, so it's not often that a Lamborghini Revuelto and a Skoda Superb meet on the same shoot. But that's what happened when we did the pictures for this year's Autocar Awards, which led me to the delightful discovery that the two share a handbrake switch.

We sometimes criticise expensive cars for using components from cheaper ones, particularly when it's in a prominent place and the part in question doesn't feel appropriate. Fiat 500 door switches aren't a good look in a £200,000 Maserati Granturismo, for instance. But deep down, I love a game of parts bin bingo.

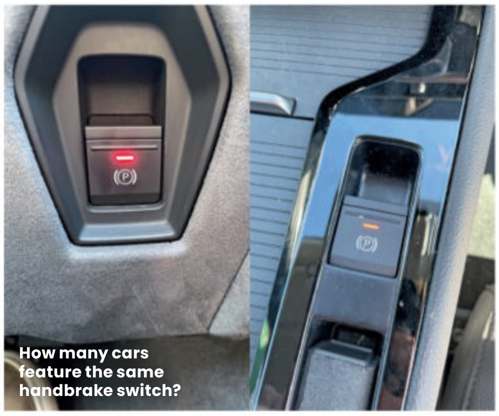
In the case of the Lambo, the handbrake switch is hidden in the lower part of the dashboard, and it doesn't feel particularly cheap, so it's ultimately inconsequential that it's shared with the Superb, the Audi A3 and probably several other Volkswagen Group cars.

I actually really enjoy the instances when it's done well, when the borrowed part integrates so well into the rest of the car that it seems entirely bespoke. Take the upside-down Vauxhall Cavalier rear lights on the TVR Griffith, or the Pagani Zonda's gauge cluster that's actually a Lancia Ypsilon's with a swishy font.

> **"The Zonda's gauge cluster is an Ypsilon's with a swishy font"**

With so much physical switchgear giving way to touchscreens, that sort of thing is much harder to find, and recognising the same software in a DS 9 as in a Peugeot 208 just isn't as exciting. Meanwhile, low-volume sports car makers, historically the masters of clever usage of parts bins, are fewer in number and higher in professionalism than they once were.

The Morgan Supersport I'm driving at the moment (full road test coming soon) isn't as fertile a hunting ground as I had hoped. Sure, it has the obvious BMW gear selector and throttle pedal, plus a column stalk and shifter paddle assembly from a previous-generation Peugeot, but its lights and buttons are all bespoke. The traction control button even has a picture of a skidding Morgan on it.



How many cars feature the same handbrake switch?

Morgan used to have my favourite parts bin application: the inspired use of Lancia Thesis rear lights and Mini headlights on the Aeromax and its various descendants. I wouldn't be surprised if Lancia made more money from selling lights to Morgan than it did selling entire Thesises.

All is not lost for the keen spotter, however. Lotuses sport some very smart Volvo column stalks, and while the steering wheels in modern Bentleys and Aston Martins look bespoke at first glance, they reveal themselves to be Audi and Mercedes-Benz items in (quite a good) disguise when you look more closely.

What's pleasing about finding these shared parts, particularly across companies that aren't in the same group, is the sense of friendly cooperation. Morgan isn't going to steal sales from the Peugeot 308, is it, so why not let it buy some column stalks?

Even though these are there for all to see, it delights a car nerd like me immensely to be able to spot and recognise them. The joy of feeling like you're part of some secret society of component diviners is not to be underestimated.

THE STOCKS
YH25 LTX

A Mini adventure

Summer's here, so it's time to celebrate with a boisterous North Yorkshire road trip in an equally boisterous car. **STEPHEN DOBIE** is your guide

PHOTOGRAPHY MAX EDLESTON

Brooke Bond Tea
THE OLD POST OFFICE
THEAKSTON
THE BAY HOTEL
OPEN ALL DAY
ACCOMMODATION
FOOD SERVED 12-9pm.
CHILDREN WELCOME
FAMILY ROOM
Wainwr

A brisk Mini and a Great British adventure: a pairing to rival jam and cream or salt and vinegar. Yes, I might be hungry, which is why we're starting in the implausibly picturesque Robin Hood's Bay, a postcard illustrator's dream ensconced in the North Yorkshire coastline. The concept of destination road trips has been ascending for a while, none more famous than the North Coast 500, right at the tip of Scotland. Perhaps we're all tempted to get stuck in but simply can't find the time, and for many Autocar readers the rollercoaster roads of the North York Moors might prove a tad easier to reach.

Easier to plan, too, maybe. We've thrown out the A-Z and kept Google Maps intervention to the bare necessities, as photographer Max and I aim to get joyously lost in the verdant vistas that surround us. But not before shielding our chips from the marauding gulls and snapping a few pics beside the seaside, of course…

Robin Hood's Bay itself is *not* a driver's mecca; it is best accessed on foot from its outskirts, but boy is it worth it. Cobbled paths, dramatic staircases and idle fishing boats surround you while the dramatic North Sea laps just feet away if the tide has rolled in. Farther up the coast you'll find Whitby, with its storied vampiric abbey and goth conventions, while the unabashed old-school charm of Scarborough lies to the south. All three are tourist magnets, so a moment of clarity (and a lungful of sea air) in Robin Hood's unique little bay before the hordes arrive is a great way to start our trip.

The latest Mini John Cooper Works quickly punctures our moment of zen, though, as its turbocharged 2.0-litre engine adds a cheeky flourish of revs on start-up. Its rather taut suspension is soon jiggling us over the humps and bumps of the urban Tarmac leading us out of town and into the wilds.

We've praised this car before on these pages, even if it pursues its performance with some wantonly rough edges. 'Twas ever thus with JCW-badged cars, but the vigour of their damping appears to have reached a whole new level here. Over a standard Cooper S the suspension uses bespoke springs and dampers, plus more negative camber on the front wheels, to more keenly point you into corners, while its four-cylinder 'B48' engine has 228bhp and 280lb ft peaks for 0-62mph in 6.1sec. The big headline, however, goes to its gearbox. The JCW is now

The JCW is rip-roaring fun on the right road. A manual 'box would be better, though

Barnards eatery, near Robin Hood's Bay, serves hearty road trip fare
Barnards
Trillo
ICE
CREAM

> *"The taut suspension jiggles us over the bumps of urban Tarmac leading us out into the wilds"*

offered only with a seven-speed dual-clutch automatic 'box – yes, the manual Mini hot hatch is dead. Indeed, the manual petrol hot hatch as a whole: in recent weeks the Ford Focus ST and Honda Civic Type R have packed up their bags ready to depart British showrooms.

My wistfulness is soon decimated by the madcap Mini's turn of pace. Without the minor pause of a clutch dip and a flick of your wrist, it snarls forward insatiably, and you'll encounter brief moments of wheelspin or torque steer if you try to deploy too much of its potency on cool or damp surfaces – there's no clever differential set-up here to smooth the edges. It's a boisterous bucking-bronco of a car over the crests and into the dips of the roads that lead us inland, but it's hard not to be enraptured by the experience. You've no choice but to get stuck in.

Our next stop lies 18 miles south, and it is an essential visit for any petrolheads in the area. Oliver's Mount is England's only road racing course that's open to the public, and it's a chance to pop the Mini between some painted kerbing with no need for a helmet or race boots. The track hosted its first race in 1946 – a celebratory affair to welcome home the troops of World War II – and essentially morphs a tight and twisting park service road into a quite fearsome circuit. Its 2.43 miles span 10 corners, and in the heat of its motorcycle races, riders reach 150mph; repeated 30mph signs ensure our pace is much calmer today. Yet with the grid markings upon its start/finish straight, its domineering control box and a roll of honour awash with Isle of Man TT legends, it won't be long before your ears pick up the phantom buzz of highly strung engines and stratospheric rev limits in the air.

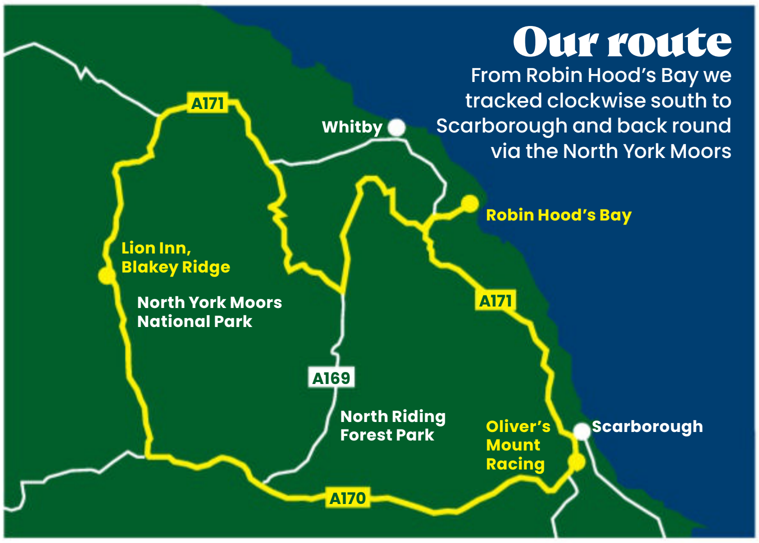
We simply have to indulge in a lap. Starting from the grid, we barrel straight into the supremely tight Mere Hairpin. TT hero and unlikely TV star Guy Martin describes notching back from fourth gear (and 130mph!) to tackle the first turn, so I channel some of his spirit with a rambunctious run through the JCW's raucous first gear on exit. The seven-speed 'box isn't exactly the star of the show – I'm finding it desperately hard not to miss a manual – but a set of pleasingly short ratios means you can meaningfully flick-flack up and down its paddles at will. Oliver's corners are a hedonistic mix, and its tree-lined sections through Sheene's Rise and Drury's Hairpin feel ominous in the context of the race speeds achieved through them – there's perilously little run-off.

Those striped kerbs make this two-way road feel all too much like an actual racetrack today, so I work hard to keep my enthusiasm in check. ▸

Petrol JCW has 228bhp. The electric version gets 255bhp but is less well suited to a road trip

Our route

From Robin Hood's Bay we tracked clockwise south to Scarborough and back round via the North York Moors



Vintage tractor run in full swing, but North Yorkshire has room for everyone

Undulating moorland roads and rolling vistas – but mind the sheep

◂ Luckily the Mini is generous with its character – a euphemism for 'blooming bolshy' – at even these speeds, ensuring a sensibly driven lap still feels scintillating. The famed Yorkshire spirit is alive and well up here too, an approaching runner zig-zagging to clear geese from the road to ease our progress. I suspect that doesn't happen quite so often in London's Royal Parks…

It would be easy to stay up here all day, Scarborough perched below us, but it's the empty moorland roads inland that drew us here in the first place. So after a quick run past the town's chintzy amusements and seafood shacks, we head off to explore. Not before being held up in an unlikely jam, though, our progress entangled with that of the Three Coasts Vintage Tractor Run. Perhaps 550 miles between Liverpool and Whitby on one of these would make the Mini feel more urbane. Even pottering through traffic there are huffs and whistles from its engine and a choreographed popping of its exhaust in sportier drive modes. While the sounds don't always tally with the alacrity of its performance, the JCW offers a more bewitching character than its recently launched electric twin – whose extra 320kg and even sterner ride would make progress tough before any range anxiety had crept in.

Clear of our curious snarl-up, I drop a few gears and extend the Mini's powertrain. Its muscular torque easily overcomes a kerb weight that looks portly in the context of its predecessors. Out of town and with more forces working its damping, the ride doesn't feel quite so uproarious, and it's hard not to beam at the sight ahead: enveloped by the rolling hills and fields around us, the Tarmac dips and rises ahead in perfect harmony with the landscape. The roads surrounding the brutalist structure of RAF Fylingdales are dreamlike – if you can avoid the trundling tour buses ready to swarm the Goathland tea rooms like wasps around a freshly garnished scone. Just watch out for the sheep…

Perhaps a rip-snorting little Mini is a mite too brash for the beauty of the roads we're on – a freshly polished classic MG or Healey might be more befitting of the scene we've entered. But the JCW's dinky size and easily won performance quickly banish those worries. You can lean hard into its limits, feel grip come and go at both ends and start to work with its agility. It's nowhere near as nuanced as the very best of the hot hatch pack – oh, how we sorely miss the Ford Fiesta STs and Hyundai i20 Ns of this world – but it's not short of spirit up here, and working around its rough edges brings its own unorthodox satisfaction.

The all-time great performance cars typically meet you at your level, enhancing and elevating you with them. This JCW falls into a somewhat more rough 'n' tumble category of cars that demand you play along to their tune. It's a car that feels happiest and sharpest when you start to throw it around a bit, at which point its ragged character starts to make more sense. Modern Works Minis were always the brasher, more uncouth offerings in the hot hatch sector, of course, but the party around this one has emptied so rapidly – the much meeker Volkswagen Polo GTI is its closest ICE-powered

PERFECT PIT STOPS

North Yorkshire is easier for most to reach than the Scottish Highlands, but it's still a decent schlep up the motorway for many Brits. Luckily there's an abundance of places to stop for refuelling – some of them perfectly on-theme. The UK's increasingly rich cars 'n' coffee culture includes The Motorist near Leeds. It's open seven days and hosts several events each week, with accommodation, a garage, a body shop and even the opportunity to get married there. Closer to the Moors is NY500, an "all wheels welcome, family-owned cafe space" in Pickering – mere minutes from some of the epic roads pictured here. It's open from 8am-3pm on weekends and bank holidays.

> ***"The Mini isn't short of spirit, and working around its rough edges brings an unorthodox satisfaction"***

rival – that the JCW now stands for resilience as much as for its rapscallion attitude.

There's plenty of professionalism inside. Its interior is a bouquet of idiosyncrasy – as is the modern Mini way – but with a convincing tech overhaul and confident material choices. The vast OLED screen is a real standout, whatever you think of its dinner-plate dimensions and the fact that Apple CarPlay sits as a crude box among it. Mini's sense of humour has never dimmed – indeed, it's increasingly crucial in the face of swelling Chinese competition. A fresh highlight comes from your doubtless rare flicks into 'Green' mode, which animate either a hummingbird or cheetah on the screen depending on how efficiently (or otherwise) you're driving. A cute encouragement to amble even more gently through the quaint villages punctuating our route, even if our ideal gamification of the driving experience would be a good ol' gearstick and three pedals.

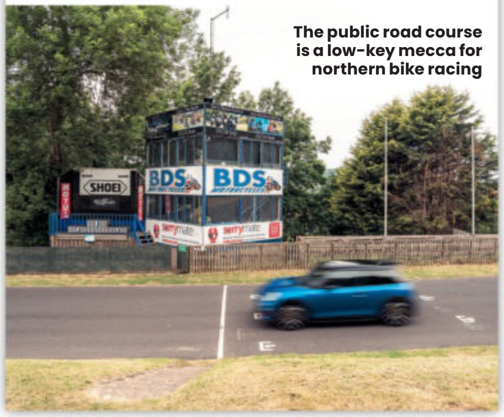
It bests its electric sibling in a number of ways, more so on days such as these. It will be a good while before charging facilities will be extensive enough to allow the wanton exploration of the twisting roads, dinky lanes and amazing scenery that we've enjoyed today – however nice it might be to slink through North Yorkshire's prettiest tableaux in reverential silence. Jaunty seaside, sprawling moorland and a bonus (not so) hot lap: this is the perfect place to get intentionally, wonderfully lost. A punchy and pugnacious yet ultimately charming performance car slots neatly into the picture postcard.

JOHN COOPER WORKS
JOHN COOPER WORKS

GO HERE, SEE THIS

Oliver's Mount boasts almost 80 years of vibrant bike racing history, and it's still alive and well. Four events remain in 2025. On 19-20 July the P&K Barry Sheene Festival hits Scarborough, with numerous stars of the TT among its grids. The SorryMate.com August Motorcycle Hill Climb takes place on 16-17 August, with adult ticket prices starting at £6 on the day – or less in advance. If you prefer on/off-road racing, the British Supermoto Championship (motorcycling's version of rallycross) is a weekend later. The headline act is the Gold Cup on 13-14 September. Visit oliversmount.com for more details.

Oliver's Mount gives a grandstand view of Scarborough below


The public road course is a low-key mecca for northern bike racing

JCW's suspension does its best to flatten the cobbles on Scarborough's quay

MINI JOHN COOPER WORKS

Price £33,265 (£38,415 as tested)
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1998cc, turbocharged, petrol
Power 228bhp at 5000-6000rpm
Torque 280lb ft at 1500-4000rpm
Gearbox 7-spd dual-clutch automatic, FWD
Kerb weight 1405kg
0-62mph 6.1sec
Top speed 155mph
Economy 41.5mpg
CO_2, tax band 154g/km, 36%

Enjoy the Silence

Nissan hopes its tie-up with a quadricycle maker will help attract younger buyers. **SAM PHILLIPS** finds out more

The newly refurbished Santiago Bernabéu stadium located in the northern part of Madrid is breathtaking. The fabled football ground recently underwent a transformation costing £1.5 billion, and it now sports a retractable roof and striking metal facade. It's amazingly grand, yet as I cruise past the home of Los Blancos, it's not the stadium that is turning heads – it's the tiny electric quadricycle I'm driving.

The Silence S04 has quietly been making a name for itself in Europe, having been sold in select markets for more than a year, but it will soon be coming to the UK with help from Nissan. The Japanese car maker partnered Silence last year and has been selling the S04 Nanocar through its dealer network in France, Germany and Italy.

Founded in 2014 by former motorcycle racer Carlos Sotelo, Silence claims to be the biggest specialist EV manufacturer on the continent and is best known for its range of electric scooters. With the exclusive distribution rights to the S04 (available in L6 and L7 forms), the model line-up – which includes a new entry-level option and a cargo version – will arrive on UK roads early next year. But why does automotive giant Nissan, which sells more than three million

SILENCE S04
NANOCAR L7E PLUS
Price £15,000 (est)
Engine Two hub motors
Power 18bhp
Torque na
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, RWD
Kerb weight 450kg
0-30mph 7.0sec
Top speed 52mph
Battery 11.2kWh
Range, economy 98 miles, na
CO$_2$, tax band 0g/km, na
Rivals Citroën Ami, Micro Microlino

cars globally each year, want to get involved with quadricycles?

"Bringing in a product that we don't build, that is complementary to our product range, is the perfect opportunity for us," explains Gareth Dunsmore, Nissan's e-mobility boss for Europe. "To be successful in the car industry right now, and over the next few years, you can't wait to be a disruptor; you have to go out there and do it yourself.

"Instead of spending three or four years designing and developing a product, we are using our expertise beyond our R&D and manufacturing and showcasing our knowledge of selling EVs."

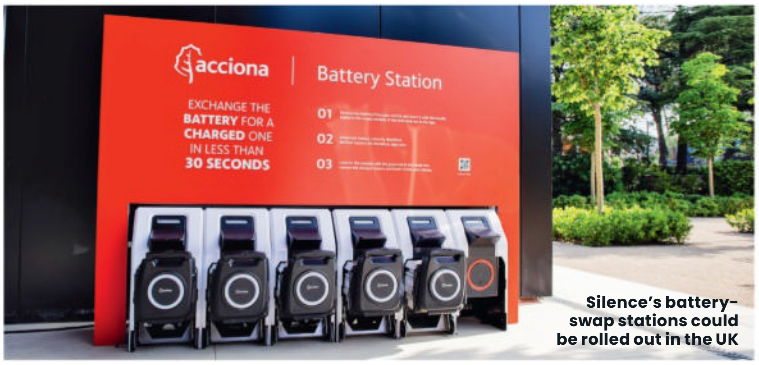
Dunsmore points to various images of the S04 on display at the Acciona Campus in Madrid, headquarters of the energy conglomerate that owns Silence.

"Just look at the diversity," he says. "You've got retirees, but you've also got young people, because the L6 S04 can be driven by 16-year-olds [in the UK], or 14- and 15-year-olds in Europe. With the rising costs of insurance and driving lessons, only around one-third of 17- to 25-year-olds now have a driver's licence – the lowest number since 2012."

"Car brands aren't relevant to young people because there is no need for them to be," continues Dunsmore. "The S04 is a way for us to put them in the driving seat, and to say we care about that demographic and we want them to be part of the Nissan family."

We drove an early version of the S04 last year when it was sold in the UK by a licensed importer, and we were impressed by its refinement, kit roster and clever battery-swap technology (Autocar, 20 March 2024). After our test drive around Madrid, the S04 feels like a better alternative to the Citroën Ami thanks to its more advanced and accessible tech, plusher interior and surprising levels of practicality. It doesn't look or feel much different from the version we sampled previously: it's rather firm-riding and doesn't feel that quick, but given its size and instant EV acceleration it's easy to thread through traffic and is definitely at home in the city.

Dunsmore says the S04 allows Nissan to cater for a young demographic


acciona
Battery Station
EXCHANGE THE BATTERY FOR A CHARGED ONE IN LESS THAN 30 SECONDS
01
02
03

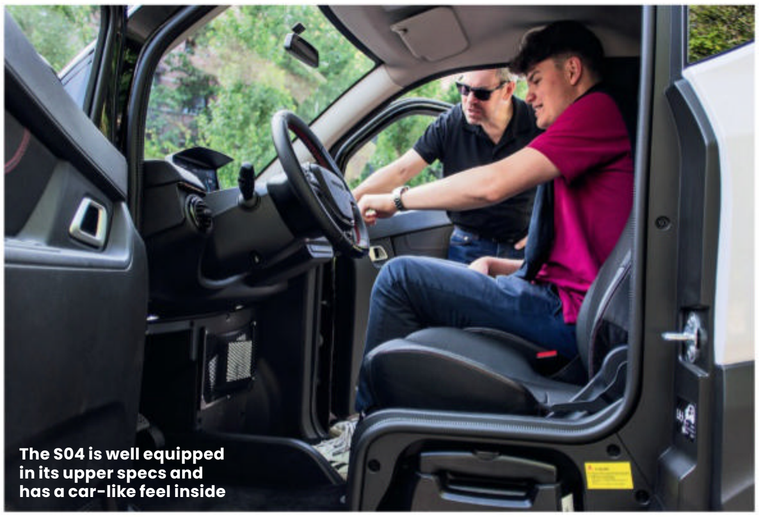
Silence's battery-swap stations could be rolled out in the UK

It's the line-up that has received the biggest overhaul. There's a new entry-level L6e Unico powered by one 5.6kWh battery for a 62-mile range and which can be driven by 16-year-olds in the UK. Don't worry, parents – it has a reversing camera as standard. The L6e Vivo (which has a 7in TFT instrument display and phone pairing) gets two removable batteries for a 11.2kWh capacity and 100-mile range. Both make 8bhp and can travel at up to 28mph, but Dunsmore believes the top-of-the-line L7e Plus, which can do 52mph and has a 100-mile range, will be more popular in the UK.

"The benefits of the L6 versus the L7 maybe aren't as extreme in the UK, and with the L7 you've got that extra power for catching up with traffic and driving on dual-carriageways," he says. Unlike the Ami, the S04 has a removable battery system carried over from Silence's e-scooters. The batteries have a trolley handle and wheels, so once you've released them from under the seats, you can take them inside for charging. S04 owners can also make use of the battery-swap stations that are currently installed in cities across Spain, enabling them to swap their depleted pack for a fresh one via a subscription service. Such stations could join the S04 in the UK, according to Dunsmore, with a focus on installing the stations where charging is less readily available.

Sales targets for the UK are unknown, but Nissan is quietly confident about Silence and its new distribution venture. If you're after a small urban EV with just enough creature comforts and polish to feel like a car, the S04 shows genuine promise. **A**

> ***"The L7e Plus does 52mph and has a 100-mile range"***



The S04 is well equipped in its upper specs and has a car-like feel inside

Used city slicker alternatives

Renault Twizy **2012, 11,000 miles, £4995**
The French pioneer sparked the quadricycle revolution, and this low-mileage example seems to be in excellent condition. It has been cared for by its previous owner since 2019 and sports the funky and rare 'Korean Window' optional extra. New discs and pads, too.

Citroën Ami 5.4kWh My Ami Buggy
2024, 550 miles, £8995
Not as refined as the Silence, but the likeably eccentric Ami is ideal for tackling city traffic and parking. This one is the sun-seeking My Ami Buggy, with folding cloth roof, khaki paint and gold wheels, and only 550 miles from new.

SAFETY FIRST

Only a few months in and already the 2025 Formula 1 season is proving to be a nail-biter, with the established driver order and team hierarchy under threat. So it's fortunate that two cars present at every race are standing ready to intervene when things get messy.

They are the official FIA safety and medical cars, since 1996 provided by Mercedes, but also now by Aston Martin. Coincidentally, and in the wake of the Spanish GP and Max Verstappen's three penalty points for a late collision, the British manufacturer showed off both its safety and medical cars at its test and development centre beside Stowe Circuit, the short and sinewy track located inside the main track complex at Silverstone.

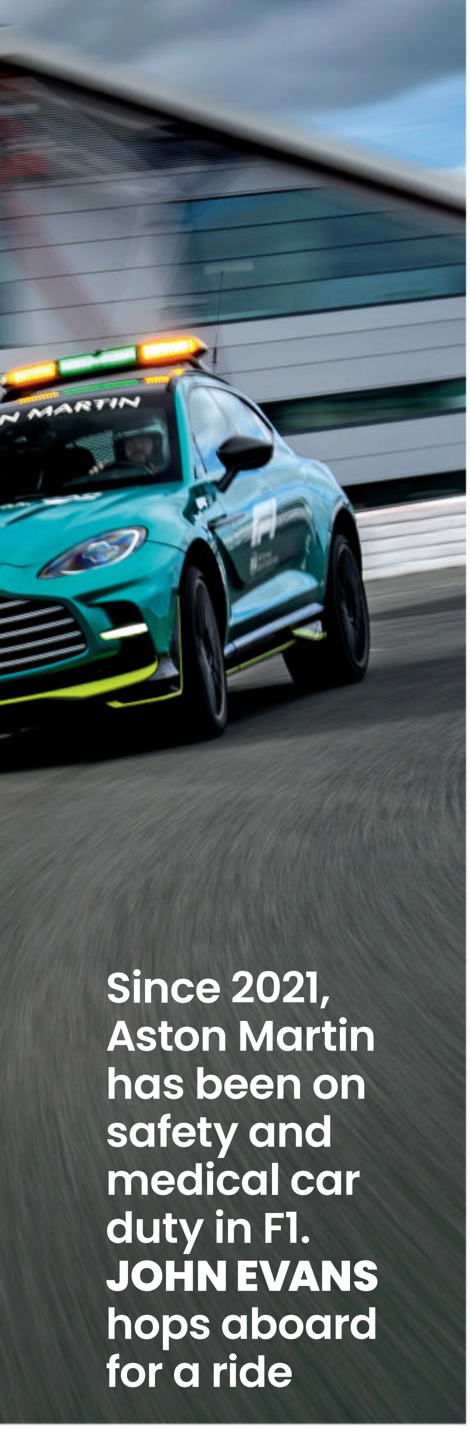
Finished in the manufacturer's trademark Racing Green with neon yellow accents on the side skirts and on the extended front splitter and rear wing, both unique to the car, and bristling with antennae and additional lighting, the Vantage has the presence necessary to bring 20 F1 drivers to heel. Its 4.0-litre twin-turbocharged V8 produces 656bhp, and it does 0-62mph in 3.4sec. The cabin is fitted with a bespoke centre console incorporating multiple light and comms buttons, screens relaying live images of the track, a rear-view camera and a pair of six-point race harnesses.

It means business, as does Bernd Mayländer, since 2000 the official FIA safety car driver and my chauffeur at the wheel of the vehicle today. "In this job you have to have been a race driver so that you can drive quickly but safely," he explains. With a racing record that includes winning Le Mans in 2000 and driving for Mercedes in the DTM championship from 2001-04, Mayländer easily ticks that box.

Vantage is a track weapon in the right hands, but F1 cars make it look slow

I've already taken the Vantage for a few cautious, solo laps of Stowe circuit but now it's time for Mayländer to show me how it's done. The track is only a little over one mile long and has eight corners plus a couple of straights. Mayländer's three laps are a breathtaking display of on-limit control, interspersed with savage acceleration and ferocious braking. Commitment like this is essential when there are 20 F1 cars looming in his rear-view mirror, he says: "Especially when there's debris on the track, the drivers don't always know and maybe get frustrated because I'm holding them back. I try not to, but safety comes first."

Back at the garage, he describes how, on race day, he and long-serving co-driver, Richard Darker, will have been strapped into their



Since 2021, Aston Martin has been on safety and medical car duty in F1. **JOHN EVANS** hops aboard for a ride

"We have to think fast and weigh up our priorities"

More Trumpton Fire Brigade than F1 safety car driver, but Evans is having a blast

DBX medical car carries fire extinguishers, medical kit and even a defibrillator

A short history of F1 safety and medical cars

1973 First F1 safety car deployed: a Porsche 914 at the Canadian Grand Prix
1978 Fatal crash at the Italian GP is the catalyst for F1 medical chief Sid Watkins to insist on the introduction of a medical car, which makes its debut at the 1978 US GP
1981 Lamborghini Countach serves as safety car at the Monaco GP
1994 Opel Vectra is safety car for the San Marino GP
1995 Medical car accidentally hits race driver Taki Inoue as he exits his car during the Hungarian GP, injuring his leg
1996 Mercedes C36 AMG safety car heralds firm's association, which continues to this day
2020 Medical car crew is at the centre of a dramatic rescue of driver Romain Grosjean in the Bahrain GP
2021 Aston Martin Vantage and DBX share joint safety and medical car duties with Mercedes-AMG
2023 DBX 707 medical car enters service
2024 Updated Vantage enters F1 safety car service

Vantage at the pit exit with the engine running for at least 10 minutes before the start. "You feel the tension," he says. Among recent races, the Australian Grand Prix stands out. "The rain was extreme and we had a few deployments and did 13 laps in total. In such conditions, you need a communicative car like the Vantage that lets you know where the track is drying out, which we report to the race director."

Meanwhile, poised at the back of the grid ready to deploy during the race's critical opening lap, is the F1 medical car. It's here at Stowe today – an Aston Martin DBX 707, one of two that have been in service since 2023. It replaced the original DBX safety car and, being a 707, has a 696bhp, 4.0-litre twin-turbo engine capable of catapulting the 2300kg SUV from zero to 62mph in 3.1sec. Fire extinguishers, medical bags and a defibrillator have their own dedicated storage compartments in the back, while the comms kit is packed in the spare-wheel well. Throughout the race, the on-board medic has access to communications from Race Control and can see not only the FIA marshalling system but also biometric data from the race drivers and live television images enabling early assessment of an incident.

Official medical car driver Karl Reindler is a former professional racer who is covering 14 F1 races this season. "The job is more than just about driving a car fast," he says. "You must also keep a cool head and have good situational awareness." Especially so, he adds, when F1 cars can almost do two laps of a circuit in the time it takes the DBX – and the Vantage – to do one. Fortunately, the car is fast enough to complete the opening lap and park up ready to deploy before the race pack bears down.

"On a deployment, we have to think fast and weigh up our priorities," says Reindler. "For example, at the start of the F2 support race of the Azerbaijan Grand Prix last year, there was a three-car pile-up that required me and my medic co-driver to decide who to prioritise. One car was in the wall on fire, another was upside down and the driver was climbing out of the third. The fire team was on its way and could take care of the burning car so we went to the one that was upside down. Fortunately, the driver was okay."

For my final laps of Stowe circuit, the DBX 707 medical car looks a safe choice. Reindler gives the big SUV the full beans. It clings on securely, at one corner betraying only a hint of understeer that he has already anticipated. If I come a cropper on my way home, I know who to call. **A**

Medical car driver Karl Reindler: "You must keep a cool head"

Bernd Mayländer has won Le Mans, but not in a safety car

GETTY IMAGES

LIVING WITH A...

Where our long-term test cars have been and what they've done

"Here's a new small car at a time when the world needs more of them"

FIRST REPORT

VOLVO EX30

We gave the EV some flak at launch. Will a longer test change our tune?

WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To see if the clever design of Volvo's small electric crossover can win us over in extended use

The EX30 is the smallest model in Volvo's current line-up, but apparently you can fit an elephant in it. Okay, it's a metaphorical elephant in the form of a 12.3in touchscreen mounted in the middle of the EX30's minimalist dashboard, but it's absolutely one we need to address.

That screen, or rather Volvo's decision to minimise the amount of switchgear by using it to control almost every function (heating, foglights, glovebox, you name it), has been the subject of plenty of criticism, including from us. When Matt Prior first sampled the EX30 in late 2023, he described it as "one of the least pleasing user interfaces on sale", reflected in his two-and-a-half-star rating.

That verdict wasn't well received in Gothenburg, especially because it was at odds with the majority of reviews. Except, well, was it really? If you strip away that verdict and read the substance of our review, it was similar to most others: praising the EX30's design and dynamics (Prior termed it "a genuinely great car to drive") but taking issue with its user interface.

Updates to that UI were promised through over-the-air software updates; some reviewers seemingly made allowance for that, but we always rate as we find.

Those UI-based criticisms held the EX30 back both in our road test and an affordable EV group test – at the same time as it continued to win plaudits and group tests elsewhere.

I can't speak for the approach of others, but for 130 years Autocar has assessed the whole package in every aspect, just as a buyer would. It doesn't matter if a car is stylish and nice to drive if you're driven to rage trying to operate it.

That's a long way of saying our new EX30 has much to prove to us. And, we should say, credit to Volvo for agreeing to let us run one: not every car firm would in similar circumstances.

Perhaps there's confidence that familiarity with the EX30 will warm us to its charms, and that subsequent software updates have improved that infotainment. Volvo does have some reason to be optimistic: it sold close to 100,000 EX30s globally last year, so there's clearly consumer demand.

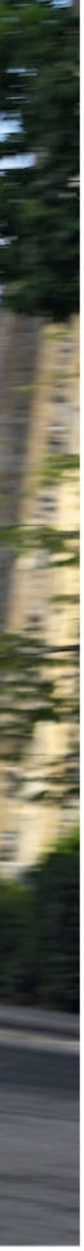
As always, we will approach this test with an open mind and enthusiasm. And, frankly, I really want to like the EX30, because it's a new, relatively small car and the world needs more of them. At a time when premium brands have been pushing to bigger, more expensive products – such as the massive and pricey Volvo EX90 – here's a new model with premium sheen yet is sensibly sized and built to be offered at reasonable cost.

I like the story of the EX30: to keep costs in check and reduce the CO_2 emitted in producing one, Volvo made all sorts of clever design decisions. Putting the window controls in the central storage unit halves the amount of wiring needed, while the big Bang & Olufsen soundbar cuts the number of separate speakers needed. And, yes, putting most of the controls on a touchscreen cuts the number of physical buttons and dials needed.

It's a nice piece of design, too: recognisably Volvo yet still fresh.

SECOND OPINION

Yes, the screen is an unavoidable presence, and yes, it has too much to do. But importantly, when correctly configured, the EX30's tech doesn't massively distract you from the fundamental act of driving – which is good, because it is rather a sweet little thing to punt around. Efficient, too. I think James will enjoy himself with this one. **FP**



EX30 feels agile around town, with its light and medium-paced steering

We already know cornering grip is strong and control of body roll impresses in kind

Attwood is tapping in more regularly than Erling Haaland

There are neat details, such as the Volvo lettering in the tail-lights, the 'Thor's hammer' headlights and a fresh take on the firm's grille slash.

Also, our EX30 is in the best spec: it's a Single Motor Extended Range model, which gives an official range of 296 miles from a 65kWh (usable) battery, while still offering 268bhp and a 0-62mph time of just 5.3sec.

Steve Cropley recently tested a Single Motor model with the smaller battery and it proved the best EX30 we had driven so far. More range should make this even better.

Speccing an EX30 is simple: there are three powertrains (Single Motor, Single Motor Extended Range and Twin Motor Performance) and three trims: Core, Plus and Ultra. We have gone for mid-level Plus, which offers niceties such as adaptive cruise control, a flexible boot system and various sensors. Total price: £39,850.

We added as much relaxing Scandi-cool as we could with the Wool Blend and pine-style Nordico upholstery, giving the interior the calming feel of a Swedish forest, and selected Moss Yellow paint, apparently inspired by coastal Scandinavian lichen. It certainly makes the EX30 stand out, even if it's nowhere near as vibrant as our new yellow Renault 5.

And so far it's proving really nice to drive. The ride can occasionally jostle a little on bumps, but that's true of many smaller cars. But the powertrain is smooth, the steering is light and direct and it's comfy and spacious inside. In short, it's as good on the road as we first reported.

And that screen? Well… the driver monitoring is annoying, the bongs are a bit tedious and I'm still occasionally having to search a bit too hard for key controls, but I'm loving having Google Maps as the native sat-nav system.

We will deal with that proverbial elephant more in the coming months. For now, we're keeping an open mind and hoping the charms of the EX30 can outweigh some of the frustrations we've previously expressed. It's going to be a fascinating car to live with.

JAMES ATTWOOD

TEST DATA

VOLVO EX30 SINGLE MOTOR EXTENDED RANGE PLUS

Price new £39,850 **Price as tested** £39,850 **Options** Moss Yellow paint £0, Pine interior £0 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Range** 296 miles (WLTP) **Economy** 3.7mpkWh (WLTP)

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james.attwood@haymarket.com

CITROEN E-C3

Matters of style and practicality have come to the fore early on

MILEAGE 1848

WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT Can Citroën's new small EV challenge the class-leading Renault 5?

While car styling will always be subjective, few models on our long-term fleet have inspired a more diverse set of opinions than the Citroën ë-C3. Not all of them have been positive, with one member of the team describing our small electric car as "not exactly a looker" and another rating it as "a solid 6/10". High praise indeed…

All balderdash, in my view. I happen to rather like the way this little hatchback looks, and while it might not be as effortlessly beautiful as some of Citroën's greatest hits (it's unlikely to ever be mentioned in the same breath as the SM or the original DS), the substance that owes itself to the style is why I'm starting to enjoy the ë-C3's so much.

The new design means Citroën's supermini is a more practical option than before, with a boot measuring 10 litres larger than in the old (ICE-only) car. It's also 20 litres more voluminous than the Hyundai Inster's boot, albeit 26 litres down on the Renault 5's.

A slight disappointment is the lack of a frunk, which you'd think the ë-C3's body shape would be perfect for. That said, there are plenty of storage compartments around the car for my needs, plus the rear seats fold down in a 60/40 split, adding extra useful space.

The car's boxy silhouette also means it's more spacious for both the driver and passenger. At 6ft 2in tall, I can sit comfortably in the front with no chance of bashing my head on the roof, and I can stretch my legs out fully with someone sitting behind me. There's enough room for two average-sized adults in the rear, too. Both of my parents sat happily enough back there, but try to squeeze in a third person and things start to feel claustrophobic.

One issue is the ë-C3's load lip, which proved awkwardly high for our ageing dog, who wouldn't even attempt to climb in.

Also, the removable boot floor, which covers a recess only just large enough for the charging cable, doesn't appear to be entirely secure, due to thin materials – perhaps one way Citroën has kept costs down. Closer examination revealed it to be nothing more than a piece of wood with fabric attached. I do wonder how this flimsy item will cope with heavier cargo and plan to find out on an upcoming holiday.

I will give the ë-C3 a pass for now, though, because otherwise it is fulfilling its brief as a well-rounded, practical small electric car.

JACK WARRICK

LOVE IT

EASY TO PARK

The ë-C3's boxy shape and four-metre length mean I've never been so good at parallel parking.

LOATHE IT

LACK OF OOMPH

It's nippy around town, but faster roads expose the ë-C3's limited reserves: just 111bhp.

TEST DATA

CITROEN E-C3 44KWH MAX

Price new £23,795 **Price as tested** £24,490 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Range** 152 miles **Economy** 3.2mpkWh **Last seen** 2.7.25

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jack.warrick@haymarket.com

Well, if you're going to cut costs, you may as well do it out of sight

JEEP WRANGLER

We put its long-distance driving ability to the test on a trip to Spain

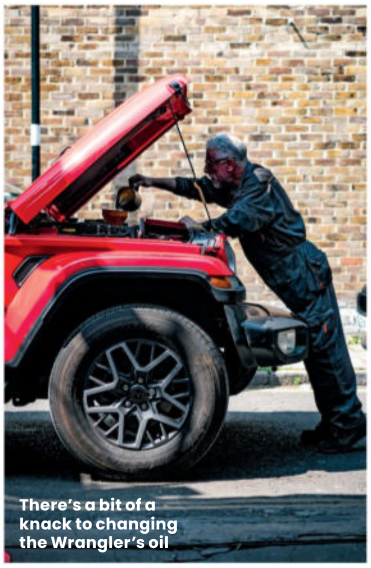
MILEAGE 22,106 **WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT** To find out if the quintessential Jeep is really a vehicle you can live with every day

Flooded road or shallow river? We're not sure and the Wrangler didn't care

Our Steve Cropley has been busy with this Jeep Wrangler, but one thing that he hasn't managed to do is take the big Tonka toy on an overseas excursion. This isn't to call into question his appetite for discomfort: he once slogged across the Australian outback to interview for a job he had been assured he wasn't going to get (he got it). But it's a fact that anything with a ladder-frame construction isn't exactly going to rock your passengers to sleep. Looking back over Steve's reports, his descriptions of the Wrangler's ride quality mostly extend to a laconic 'rough', while conceding that after a bit you do stop noticing it – something I now agree with wholeheartedly.

I'm freshly in a position to pass judgement, having just come back from Spain. My wife and I took the ferry out to Santander then drove up through France. There are better cars on our fleet in which to cover 2000 miles and certainly more economical ones, but trust me: none are as fun-loving or reassuring for five days gallivanting through the remoter parts of Asturias and León, looking out for – among other exciting beasts – those frustratingly clandestine Iberian wolves.

As for the business of motorway toiling, the Wrangler really wasn't at all bad. With that slabby frontal area, anything above 75mph feels like re-entry, but keep it steady and it rolls along easily enough, and resists hunting and drifting off line



There's a bit of a knack to changing the Wrangler's oil

as the Ineos Grenadier likes to do.

Excellent chunky seats, too. Poor hi-fi, though.

With 20,000 miles on the clock, the digital display threw up an oil-change warning two days before we left. That meant £100 spent at a little independent garage round the corner and a big stretch over the car's ridiculous prognathic bumper for poor Tasos the mechanic, but inspection of the old oil revealed that it was well worth doing.

Other than that, the car was perfectly reliable.

Foibles include the total lack of a footrest in the narrow pedal box; the fact that the metal-effect dip on the driver's side door handle is already peeling off; the lack of a boot cover (particularly annoying when you're carting all your clobber from place to place); and, of course, the fact that you have to swing open the wide tailgate before you can fold up the upper glass panel, which makes parking in the medieval parts of various European cities a challenge. In tight corners you also need to be mindful of snagging the chunky rear arches. Oddment storage could be better, too: there are cupholders but no trays for keys and the like, other than the one directly beneath the armrest cover, so we kept losing bits and bobs.

You can pack loads of stuff and access it very easily. Shame it's all on show

> **"We gallivanted through the remoter parts of Asturias and Léon, looking out for Iberian wolves"**

Positives? This generation of Wrangler steers with actual accuracy, so it doesn't drain you attritionally during a day in the saddle. It is remarkably car-like for something with a low-range gearing. The lack of over-sensitive ADAS is refreshing. Climbing up into the Wrangler's chunky cabin, with its great visibility through the pillbox windscreen, never fails to give you a little dopamine hit. Its Android Auto works nicely. The 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol engine is far more effective and characterful than I expected, hauling two tonnes of Ohio-built bulk about in pretty effortless fashion. The gearbox is fine, too: you don't have to think about it. Less tangibly, the thing has a sense of occasion – something, say, a BMW X5 will never match. Equally, the economy wasn't terrible (for the entire trip, the brim-to-brim figure was 30.3mpg), and the 81-litre fuel tank means you can make plenty of uninterrupted progress when needed.

LOVE IT

DOING IT FOR THE KIDS

Unsurprisingly, children love the Wrangler, frequently craning to get a better look at it. It really is just a massive toy car.

LOATHE IT

TREADS A TAD LIGHT

'Loathe' is too strong a word, but Bridgestone's Dueler tyres, while good on Tarmac, are a limiting factor if you stray much off it.

Bronco is the Wrangler's closest rival – or would be if Ford sold it in the UK

As for proper off-roading in Spain, in the end the Wrangler played a supporting role. You need a permit to access the really horrible tracks that take you up into the wildest valleys in León, so this task was undertaken by our guide's fabulously trusty and surprisingly comfy Land Cruiser (white with a manual 'box, cloth seats and steelies – the bee's knees, basically). However, there was no question that our Jeep could have scrambled anywhere the Toyota went, had we needed it to. I've experienced the colossal toughness and capability that lurks behind the cartoonish looks first hand, having spent three days in the JL-generation car on the axle-breaking Rubicon Trail in 2018 – still perhaps the most memorable and brilliant thing I've done in this job. Unlike the Land Cruiser, the Wrangler's driveline can also be put into pure rear-wheel-drive mode for better everyday economy and oversteer on damp switchbacks.

So the Wrangler returns from this 2200-mile jaunt with its Swiss Army knife credentials, if anything, enhanced. Honestly, I was surprised how easy it made the mile-bashing, and even a 10-hour blast home from La Rochelle wasn't knackering (even if the car's adaptive cruise control simply will not let you sweep around slower motorway traffic smoothly). I know that, for a price, a Defender would have made life easier still, and we saw quite a few in the Basque Country and around Bordeaux. But, tellingly, seeing the Land Rovers go by through the fly-spattered windscreen of our plodding Wrangler, I wasn't at all envious.

RICHARD LANE

TEST DATA

JEEP WRANGLER 2.0 GME SAHARA

Price new £61,125 **Price as tested** £62,090
Faults None **Expenses** Oil change £100
Economy 30.3mpg **Last seen** 25.6.25

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steve.cropley@haymarket.com

DACIA DUSTER

“With this cut-price, good-looking, feature-packed SUV, I thee wed”

MILEAGE 4572
WHY WE’RE RUNNING IT To see if a sub-£27k price tag really does give you all the car you’ll ever need

If anything is going to test a meadow-skipping, hand-holding honeymoon period, it’s your first big trip away. How will you get on for an extended period in each other’s company? Will previously unseen cracks appear? Could what at first seemed to be your perfect match suddenly no longer be ‘the one’? We’ve all been there.

And so the time finally came for my first relationship-testing road trips with the Duster – fittingly in the run-up to my actual wedding.

The value SUV had up until that point proven to be a worthy driveway buddy. It had been easy to use in town and pretty comfy on my traffic-heavy commutes. But now for a stiffer test: 2000 miles of travelling over the course of a few weeks, involving my stag do, a cross-country birthday excursion and finally a 350-mile round trip for the big day. We would be covering motorways, A-roads, B-roads and the odd town centre. Jitters? None at all. The foundations of our month-long relationship already ran deep.

First, the Duster is spacious, with a boot that can swallow up to 517 litres of kit – perfect for a weekend away for four adults or a full load of wedding decor, suits and other matrimonial paraphernalia. In the cabin, even with all five seats taken, it doesn’t feel tight, and there are enough cubbies for the road trip essentials.

Something borrowed, something blue: Duster’s boot swallowed all manner of wedding kit

Sadly, it took all of five minutes on the very first of these journeys for something to appear on my radar: the speakers are a bit rubbish. Normally I’m a podcast commuter and, at the weekends, a live sport listener, so music doesn’t really get played in the car unless a road trip is in effect. So when my brother chucked a playlist on, trying to set the mood for the stag weekend, it was sad to hear a tinny mess of noise rather than, er, the tinny sound of early 2000s pop classics.

LOVE IT

LOOKING GOOD

Compared with the previous model, the new Duster has grown up and I love its new rugged appearance. Next to a Defender, it doesn’t look £40k cheaper.

LOATHE IT

CARRY ON SCREENING

The screen can be annoying. Most commonly, pressing the volume buttons doesn’t always default to music and may turn up the nav guidance instead. A screen reset is needed to fix it.

Yes, the Duster costs from just £19,380, but I’d expect more from our £26,700 Journey-trim model: the sound quality in a new, £20,000 Peugeot 208 is much better, for example. Anyway, our poor singing drowned out the poor speakers, so no real harm done.

However, when the phone rang en route to Essex for some birthday celebrations a couple of weeks later, I discovered another issue: the microphone. Trying to take calls at speeds of more than 55mph resulted in too much noise being picked up and the caller not being able to hear me clearly. Dipping below 55mph presented no issues. Frustrating, though – so much so that I’ve been looking at aftermarket solutions.

These long journeys also revealed that the Duster’s seats aren’t as cushioning as they feel on shorter trips. At six feet tall, I’ve found it hard to locate the perfect seating position, too, given the low roofline (my view feels obscured if the seat is too high) and raised floor (my knees are in my chest if the seat is too low).

However, most of these issues were instantly forgotten as soon as the month’s fuel bill came in: more than 2000 miles, four fill-ups and… just £260 spent. That’s 13p a mile, and it’s why the Dacia’s full hybrid set-up is the thing I’m beginning to love most about this car. Yes, the 1.6-litre engine is a bit gruff at times, and the clutchless four-speed gearbox can hold on to revs slightly too long (and therefore be quite loud), but it switches between electric and petrol driving seamlessly and a 55mpg-plus return on any kind of journey is plain silly – in a good way, of course. Plus, the Duster is just a great-looking thing, so it’s hard to stay mad at it for long.

Yes, there are niggles, but no other car at a similar price point offers as much for less. This was summed up by the new Mrs Rimell: “I love that there is a new car as big as the Duster that I might actually be able to afford.” And that’s just the point of a Dacia, isn’t it?

WILL RIMELL

TEST DATA

DACIA DUSTER HYBRID 140 JOURNEY

Price new £26,050 **Price as tested** £26,700 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 56.6mpg **Last seen** 2.7.25

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will.rimell@haymarket.com

MINI ACEMAN

We compare our fleet's two base-spec urban EVs

MILEAGE 1421
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To find out how easy it is to live with a small-battery EV in 2025

KN25 KZP
YE74 NKC

Would you take the ë-C3 or the Aceman on looks alone?

You never thought you would read the terms 'Mini', 'SUV', 'electric' and 'good value' in the same sentence, but here we are.

The realisation that my Mini might actually be a bit of a bargain came after spending some time in our new Citroën ë-C3. It is, after all, a very close rival to the Aceman E.

Okay, so BMW-era Mini has been all about sporty handling and puppyish fun while Stellantis-era Citroën has focused on comfort and simplicity, but both of these cars are small electric SUVs with sub-200-mile ranges aimed at young people: jacked-up versions of established superminis with strong heritage and legions of fans.

Reassuringly, despite those similarities, the ë-C3 and Aceman are very different cars. There are people online who decry that "all electrical cars are the same" (they like to use 'electrical' as an unfunny faux naivety), but they are actually pretty different to drive.

The Aceman at times feels at odds with itself, its firm and unforgiving suspension slapping its city car remit in the face. Meanwhile, the ë-C3 feels much more fit for purpose when confined to 30mph limits, largely due to its soft suspension.

Out of town, the Aceman is a better companion. It's some 80bhp up and therefore 3.0sec quicker from 0-62mph. At times, the difference between the pair feels even stronger than that, I suspect because the ë-C3 is actually a full second slower than its advertised time, according to our stopwatch.

Practicality is much of a muchness between them. The French car's boot is slightly bigger and I, as a slightly-below-average-height man, wouldn't like to sit in the rear seats of either for too long.

Comfort is key in this class, so I would happily take the Citroën's leisurely pace in exchange for a more leisurely, less bone-jarring and happier ride around town.

Like-for-like comparisons paint the red Citroën at about £5000 more than the silver Mini. Out of context, that's a huge sum of money, for sure – but if you're shopping around and not too fussy about the options, the Aceman works out at about £50-£100 more per month on finance.

This figure really stood out to me as I inserted the key into the Citroën's ignition (sic) barrel and twisted it. This feels absolutely bizarre in an EV: your hand is expecting a bit of feedback from a small set of controlled explosions that never come.

The Citroën's instrument cluster above the steering wheel works really well and looks much more premium than the flimsy head-up display in the Mini. But nearly everywhere else the look and feel of the Aceman bests that of the Citroën. The seats, infotainment, dashboard all just ace (ahem) that perceived quality thing. It feels well put together. Unique, even. Well, unique to the Mini brand, but you know what I mean. By contrast, the Citroën largely just feels like yet another Stellantis product.

Sure, I think the Aceman's ride is rotten and I still can't get on with the circular infotainment touchscreen. But for me it's easily worth another £50 per month.

And things are set to get trickier for the ë-C3 as the new Fiat Grande Panda Electric arrives – the same mechanicals but on a more recognisable model, and one already well received.

MURRAY SCULLION

LOVE IT

SUNNY DAYS

Warm weather and a lot of short journeys mean I'm regularly seeing more than 4.0mpkWh.

LOATHE IT

SLOW GOING

Its slow charging speeds 70kW (DC) and 11kW (AC) continue to frustrate. Although it somehow recently managed 75kW...

TEST DATA

MINI ACEMAN E CLASSIC

Price new £31,800 **Price as tested** £34,350 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Range** 141 miles **Economy** 4.0mpkWh **Last seen** 2.7.25

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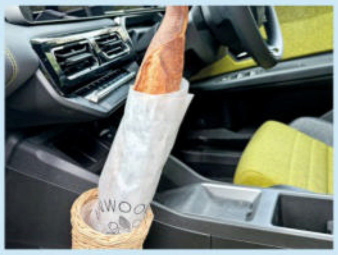
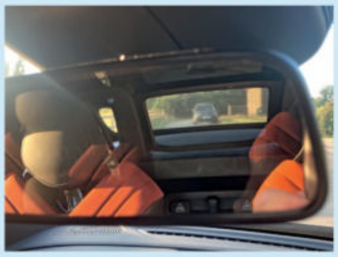
murray.scullion@haymarket.com

SNAPSHOTS



RENAULT 5

Mileage 2525 **Last seen** 2.7.25
As you may have read last week, our new Renault 5 arrived in a big hurry, straight off the boat. There wasn't even time to fit its most important option, the baguette holder, but we've now righted that wrong. Here it is, securely in place, housing a top-quality stick of British sourdough. Plans are already afoot, via the Channel, to be sure a genuine French loaf fits just as well. **SC**



MG CYBERSTER

Mileage 3990 **Last seen** 2.7.25
The Cyberster's rear-view mirror makes cars appear wider and lower (ie more exotic) than they are. You think an Audi E-tron GT is behind but it's actually an A4. A Bentley Continental GT closing in at speed turns out to be a BYD Seal. It's hard to photograph, so you will have to take my word for it. I quite like a world full of low-slung sports cars; it's a shame when they pop into view in the more honest door mirrors. **MP**

BMW 1 SERIES

Mileage 5045 **Last seen** 25.6.25
Someone quite possibly has my 120's M Sport brakes (part of the M Sport Pro pack) to thank for the continuing companionship of their cat, who chose a terrible time to sprint out from under a parked van. The enhanced system has larger, ventilated discs, fixed front calipers (instead of floating ones) and four pistons (rather than one) at the front. Stopping just in time, I felt as if I'd paid £2075 to save my soul. **KC**

USED CARS

HOW TO BUY A **JAGUAR XF**

WHEN JAGUAR MADE THE EXECUTIVE DECISION EASY

The second-gen XF is an engaging A6 rival and a compelling used buy

"A more mature all-round prospect, with class-leading dynamics." That's how we described the brilliant second-gen Jaguar XF when we first drove it 10 years ago.

Jaguar axed its mid-size saloon and estate last year and embarked on an exuberant rebrand that only those living in Antarctica will have missed. In the meantime, prices for the XF have tumbled, and now you can bag this swish, left-field 5 Series alternative for as little as £4000.

Of course, the cheapest XFs are leggy examples showing clear signs of hard use, but with a healthier budget of about £9000 you will easily find a well-maintained XF with a more palatable mileage. And that's still a bargain for a smart-looking executive car that's pleasant to ride around in and excellent to drive.

Ditching its predecessor's outdated Ford platform, the Mk2 XF is based around an aluminium-rich structure that's both lighter and stronger. This well-conceived chassis, coupled with the XF's weighty, intuitive steering, makes it a treat to thread down a B-road, offering plenty of rear-drive engagement. Yet it remains a comfortable cruiser, ironing out road irregularities with aplomb and cosseting passengers in an upmarket cabin.

It's not quite up to Audi A6 standards, but perceived quality is good. The ambience is enhanced by neat tricks like blue ambient lighting, and the second-gen car's longer wheelbase means there's more head and leg room in the back. The saloon also has a 540-litre boot, which trumps its BMW and

All trim levels are generous; post-2020 facelift cars get superior Pivi Pro infotainment

What we said then

2 DECEMBER 2015

"Around the new XF's class-leading steering, ride quality and feelsome balance, its maker has clustered a spacious, well-finished and very handsome car. It continues to feel like an XF, too – one thoughtfully matured into a better all-round prospect. It would be a near-flawless one if Jaguar had succeeded in polishing the Ingenium powerplant to the same standard. For now, the engine is the only reason buyers have for thinking twice. In time, there may well be none."

Audi rivals, while the Sportbrake estate swallows 565 litres.

You can choose from Prestige, Portfolio or the sportier R-Sport and S trims. Prestige has bi-xenon headlights, leather upholstery and heated front seats, but we would opt for the Portfolio's posher Windsor leather, bigger 18in alloy wheels and reversing camera. A 70,000-mile Prestige costs around £8500, but Portfolios of a similar condition are no dearer.

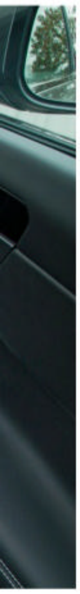
R-Sport receives a bodykit and firmer suspension, but the S versions get the bigger V6 engines and adaptive dampers. The 375bhp supercharged 3.0-litre V6 petrol sounds sweet and feels quick, but don't discount the 296bhp twin-turbocharged diesel six-pot. Vast torque – 513lb ft – makes it punchier, it's generally refined and it will do around 45mpg on the motorway.

The 2.0-litre four-pot Ingenium diesels dominate the small ads, and you can choose between 161bhp and 178bhp variants. They are efficient but plagued by diesel particulate filter and timing chain issues (see 'Buyer Beware', right) so are best avoided, especially the twin-turbo 237bhp unit of 2017. Petrol four-pots came with 197bhp and 247bhp, but they're rarer and cost more to tax.

The facelifted XF, which landed in 2020 and brought in styling and interior upgrades, got mild-hybrid petrol and diesel four-cylinder engines. The interior is a cut above, with soft-touch materials, plush leather, tactile switchgear and massaging seats, plus an 11.4in Pivi Pro touchscreen infotainment system that's graphically strong and pretty easy to operate.

Needless to say, the Mk2 XF nails the executive saloon brief. If you need a plush motorway cruiser that's dynamic, comfortable and premium-feeling, investing in this used Jag is money well spent.

SAM PHILLIPS



The rear-wheel-drive XF is fun, agile and engaging on a B-road

> **"The 375bhp supercharged 3.0-litre V6 petrol engine sounds sweet and feels quick"**

How to get one in your garage

AN OWNER'S VIEW

JASON SEMANIC

"The XF immediately stood out, with its character, elegant design and genuinely rewarding drive. I bought a 25t and found it to be bulletproof over 40,000 miles. The reputation for poor reliability has been completely false in my experience: only routine servicing has been needed. After stints in an Audi S5 and a Tesla Model 3 Performance, I eventually returned to an XF S with the supercharged V6. It's quick, composed and fantastic on the open road. This generation of Jaguar is seriously underrated. It offers real driving credibility in a way few cars do."

BUYER BEWARE...

■ ENGINE

Walk away if you hear a knocking noise from the V6 diesel. It's an early sign of crankshaft failure, which starves the engine of oil and can cause a full seizure.

Timing chains can stretch over time and eventually snap if not repaired, again causing major engine damage. Check the car's history to see if it has been replaced, and listen out for rattles from the engine from start-up.

Any issues with the alternator will first appear as a 'Charging System Fault' message and red warning light on the dashboard. Alternator problems can vary from the auxiliary belt slipping off and stopping it from turning to the battery failing to hold charge.

A clogged up diesel particulate filter is pretty common on the 2.0-litre Ingenium diesel engine, particularly so with early examples. Watch out for reduced performance or blue smoke on a test drive.

■ GEARBOX

The gear selector that rises up from the centre console can get stuck, stopping you from putting the car into drive. A weak battery or faulty brake switch is often the cause.

■ BODY

Check for dents and scuffs to the bodywork: the aluminium panels can be expensive either to repair or to replace. Chrome elements can also cloud over and will need to be replaced.

■ ELECTRICS

Play around with the touchscreen to make sure all the different menus and functions work. If it freezes it will need to go to Jaguar for a software update.

ALSO WORTH KNOWING

If you want to avoid any timing chain issues, it's best to opt for a post-2019 XF: the 2.0-litre diesels were fitted with an upgraded timing chain that eliminated any problems.

The V6 oil-burner suits the long-distance nature of the Sportbrake estate in particular, but expect to pay upwards of £16,000 for one of these.

HOW MUCH TO SPEND

£4000-£11,999

Lots of Prestige, Portfolio and R-Sport cars to choose from. Plenty of cheaper high-mileage examples, but you should easily find a tidy car, even V6 petrols and diesels.

£12,000-£17,999

A broad mix of trims, mainly paired with a diesel engine. Mileages here are a bit more reasonable, and there are plenty of tidy one-owner and full-service-history cars.

£18,000-£24,999

Predominantly later pre-facelift cars with 20,000-50,000 miles. Diesel continues to dominate.

£25,000-£34,999

Handful of low-mileage V6 Sportbrake models, but more D200 diesel saloons in immaculate condition.

£35,000 AND ABOVE

Nearly new examples with ultra-low mileages on the clock. Dealer sales only.

ONE WE FOUND

JAGUAR XF 3.0D V6 S, 2016, 65,000 MILES, £12,999

This pristine XF S is in swish Tempest Grey with a large kit roster, including cruise control and two-tone Windsor leather. But we would buy it for its smooth diesel V6 and full Jaguar history.

My car & I

Getting in a flap over a classic 911

Julian Carlson has just told me that those who know see his 1972 Porsche 911 S 2.4 and say: "It's the one with the oil filler flap!" Just then, a chap walks by and says exactly that.

"The oil filler/inspection flap, which is on the rear wing behind the right-hand door, was unique to E-series 911s like mine that were built in 1971-72," says Julian. "After complaints that owners and petrol station attendants had mistaken it for the fuel filler and put petrol into the oil tank, which ruined the engine, Porsche relocated the tank to its earlier position and got rid of the flap." It's a wonderful story that only adds to his car's charm and, I venture, to its value as something of a rarity. Julian is not convinced: "I'm not sure I paid anything more for it because of the oil flap."

Painted in GT Silver and riding on classic Fuchs wheels, his Porsche is every enthusiast's idea of a classic 911. It's one of the reasons Julian bought it. "Ever since I was a small boy, I've loved the 911," he says. "I had a Matchbox model of one, and for years it went everywhere with me. My first real one was a 1988 Carrera, in black, which I owned for five years. I loved that car but sold it to buy my current one, because Sadiq Khan was going to charge me

Our cars

A timely recall rekindles a forgotten love

BY WILL RIMELL

Opening a letter in 2025 always feels like a stressful situation. The only ones I seem to get these days are bills or some kind of parking fine. So when an envelope turned up bearing a BMW emblem, more worry set in. What have I done now?

Luckily, it was just the German brand telling me my 16-year-old car might have a faulty screw in the engine that could lead to loss of power and damage. That was a relief – apart from the dodgy screw, of course.

So I dusted off the Z4 – it's been a fair few weeks since I've properly driven it and I had been thinking of selling it – and got it down to the local BMW dealer.

It felt great to drive it again, and I couldn't wait to pick it up later for a proper post-work blast. Of course, the work then took all day, but I was able to grab it before the dealer closed for the weekend. They even cleaned it for me and said it was "in really great nick", which made up for it.

On pick-up the sun was out, so the roof came off. And it was then that I found a new love (again) for the Zed, especially with that inline six parping behind me. Maybe it can stay a little longer.

Beneath the Z4's bonnet lurked an errant screw poised to wreak havoc

Cabin is of the no-frills kind. This LHD car was built for the US market

Old-school non-turbo engine makes 190bhp and needs – and likes – to be revved

"It can go a bit light at the front when you push on. You just have to respect it"

£12.50 a day to drive it in London, and a car older than 40 years doesn't attract the charge. I also bought it because for me it represents the essence of the 911."

Julian bought the car from Paul Stephens, a specialist Porsche dealer in Halstead. "He deserves a plug!" says Julian. "He's a lovely chap and it's a great business. The car itself is immaculate, but being more than 50 years old it's only natural that it has been refurbished at intervals. The body has certainly had some work. It was originally built for the US and then exported back to Germany, from where it went to the UK to be refurbished by AFN, the old UK importer of Porsches. It passed through a number of hands before being exported back to California and then, finally, coming back to the UK. Of course, having been built for the US, it's left-hand drive, so if I ever sell it, it could easily end up going abroad again."

Julian bought the car with 58,000 miles on the clock and has since added 10,000. "I've driven it all over the UK and it's been absolutely reliable," he says. "It has no power steering or even power brakes. It's light and very old-school, so with 190hp and rear-wheel drive, you treat it with respect.

"There are lots of stories about how old 911s handle in the wet, but drive one to the conditions and they're fine. Mine can go a bit light at the front when you push on, but you just have to respect it. People get in it and say: 'Oh my God, this is hideous! How can you enjoy driving it?' I'll admit it feels its age, but the engine is smooth and gives its best when you rev it. Unlike modern turbocharged engines that produce their power low down in the rev band, you have to work the 911's engine. That's half the pleasure of owning it."

JOHN EVANS

CAUGHT IN THE CLASSIFIEDS

JENSEN INTERCEPTOR MKIII
1973, 78,000 miles, £44,950
This Jensen Interceptor is a meticulously maintained 1970s classic. The bodywork has been fully restored, it has recent discs and pads and the 7.2-litre V8 "sounds fantastic". The interior has some signs of wear and tear but is totally original.

LAND ROVER SERIES 3
1976, 49,000 miles, £24,995
This 1976 Series 3 has covered only 2000 miles since 2013 but has been kept roadworthy. This tough Landie is tax- and MOT-exempt and wants for nothing: it has a galvanised chassis and totally original bodywork. It even has a Bluetooth retro radio to connect to your smartphone.

VOLKSWAGEN T2 BAY WINDOW CAMPER VAN
1972, 100,000 miles, £29,995
This T2 restomod could be ideal for summer. It looks like a classic Bay Window camper but has a fuel-injected Subaru boxer engine, five-speed 'box and disc brakes. It cruises at 70mph and climbs hills with ease.

FERRARI 308 GTS
1979, 58,000 miles, £74,000
This 308 GTS with Rosso Chiaro paint, a targa top and a 2.9 V8 would be a fine classic Ferrari investment. It has a detailed history file and was given a full service last year, when the cambelt was replaced.

Head to head

ALEX WOLSTENHOLME

2004 FORD MONDEO ST220

VS

JONATHAN BRYCE

2010 FORD FOCUS ST 2.5 ST-3

Brief: With the Ford Focus ST off sale, find a super-cool 'Fast Ford' that won't break the bank

AW We all know the signs of a good spec, right? Mine has them all: a classy colour, silver wheels, light leather, clear glass. Yours, on the other hand, belongs in McDonald's car park on a Monday night.

JB I don't think the term 'classy' suits any fast Ford. They're an affordable, workaday way of showing up sports cars – and my £9k Focus ST is not only faster than your car but more powerful too.

AW Fair enough – it may not be as fast or handle quite as sweetly, but my £5500 Mondeo has detached itself from the loutish image. Even in black, yours is a bit boy-racer, so why not indulge that bit further and just get an orange one?

JB Yours does seen tastefully specified, and it's very tidy. But these cars want to be a bit boorish: sober paint schemes be damned. Plus yours is much older than mine and has covered twice the miles.

AW Okay, yours is a bit younger. But the Mondeo is like a middle-aged athlete in a tuxedo: all the style and enough performance remaining to beat most.

JB There's a lot to be said for a practical, stylish Mondeo – but a small, roguish Focus is equally appealing. I guess it depends on your preferred font for fast Fords.

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The Autocar Lost in the archive

Sports cars have always been put into higher insurance groups

How insurance went from anecdotal to scientific

The UK's car insurance industry recently began using a new assessment system that is intended to give insurers a far more detailed view of risk, scoring each car from 1 to 99 in the areas of performance, damageability, repairability, safety and security. This replaced a grouping system unchanged since 2009 but said to have first emerged half a century ago – although that part is true only in a formal sense.

Take this letter to Autocar by 'Disgusted of Bearsden', written in 1938, eight years after car insurance became mandatory: "I have been insured since 1918 and never had a single penny from any insurance company, yet because I purchase a Speed 20 Alvis, my company tell me they can no longer cover the risk to my passengers. There is nothing to prevent me buying a large American car, even faster than the Alvis, yet it is not penalised because it is not a 'sports' car."

The editor replied: "The cost of repairs tends to be higher in cars that are not mass-produced. This involves increased premiums for an equal accident risk."

An underwriter seethed in reply: "Your correspondent seems a typical 'sports car' owner, entirely concerned with himself. Records of insurance companies will show him that 'sports cars' have proved a very bad risk and do not pay at ordinary rates. 'Sports cars' are purchased by people who try to get their sport on our roads. Let the sporty boys keep to the track."

Forward 20 years and this from a columnist shows little had changed: "If a high-performance, two-seater sports car is made available at a price which many young men could afford, the car is likely to get such a bad name and therefore bad record in insurance circles, that it in turn becomes virtually uninsurable. What matters to insurance people, who must be entirely impersonal, are the model's accident record and the owner's age."

The formalisation of vehicle risk assessment began in 1966, as the Accident Offices Association (AOA), representing 90 insurance companies with three million clients, devised a 'new deal'.

We hope this poor chap's car didn't get blacklisted by insurers

Thatcham Research started 'tearing down' cars for insurers in 1970

GETTY IMAGES

Autocar believed "the process by which insurers have in the past 'blacked' a car even before it had a record, and regardless of driver, was (and still is) a bad and unfair one" and hoped "a gradual change for the better is on the way". But while the AOA "recognised that there should be greater incentive and reward for good, accident-free driving" and would be able to offer this thanks to advancements in computing, it also penalised cars "of higher than average performance" when sorting them into seven groups.

Furthermore, foreign cars were usually pricier than British ones to insure, despite "tremendous improvement in importers' organisations and their dealer networks" in many cases.

This was a difficult time for the UK's insurance industry: as car ownership soared, up to 100 new companies piled into the market, pulling down premiums and profits – and many of them quickly failed.

The trouble came to a head in 1971, when a stock market fall dealt a fatal blow to Vehicle & General, the UK's second-biggest insurer, leaving 500,000 people unable to drive. They joined the 1.5 million or so who had suffered likewise in the '60s – none of whom were guaranteed any money back.

The government responded by passing the Insurance Companies Act 1974, giving it greater powers of oversight, and the Policyholders Protection Act 1975, guaranteeing 90% of a person's promised benefits.

This was actually a light-touch option: Autocar had suspected that the new Labour government might even nationalise car insurance.

Meanwhile, the UK importers for Japan's Datsun said: "For some time now, we have been convinced that insurance rates for Datsun cars are unrealistically high. [In response] we have concluded an agreement with an underwriting syndicate at Lloyd's. Largely because [this] has, after close examination of the cars and their service and spares back-up, reclassified them into lower groupings than those given by the Motor Conference, appreciable premium savings are possible."

By 1978, we found that "the whole market now appears to be united in following the recommendations of the AOA for grouping purposes, although there is no compulsion".

Much of the credit for the new groupings was owed to Thatcham Research, an organisation set up by the UK insurance industry in 1970. It crash-tested cars to understand repair possibilities, methods and timescales and suggest changes to cut costs – and still does to this day.

KRIS CULMER

If you want to get lost in the archive...
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In pre-war years, we concerned ourselves with braking effort, gradient climbing capability and rolling resistance. Later our attention shifted to take in acceleration, top speed, stopping distance and cruising noise level.

Today we use the Horiba MIRA proving ground in the Midlands to take similar performance benchmarks of new cars – and we've recently expanded the test's remit to take in braking stamina over repeated stops and, in the case of electrified cars, DC rapid-charging performance and measured acceleration at both high and low indicated states of battery charge.

Our tests are designed first and foremost to assess the fitness for intended purpose of any given new car – and to do it better and more thoroughly than any other independent test there is.

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Matt Saunders, road test editor

STAR RATINGS EXPLAINED

Autocar star ratings aren't like those you may read elsewhere. We don't simply give the best car in any given class five stars, the worst one star and filter the rest in between.

Rather than thinking in entirely relative terms, we rank cars according to more abstract definitions of their performance, functionality and fitness for purpose, so that every particular verdict means something and has a degree of permanence.

We also penalise cars up to a star for what we consider particularly conspicuous and regressive failings concerning active safety systems or missing instrumentation or physical secondary controls.

☆ Hopeless, egregious. In some cases, potentially dangerous.
⯪ Appalling. An emphatic failure.
★ Very poor. Consistently flawed or seriously misconceived.
★⯪ Inadequate. Sub-standard in key areas.
★★ Mediocre. Acceptable at best.
★★⯪ Competent. Mostly average, with very few highlights.
★★★ Respectable. Consistently decent, with some strengths.
★★★⯪ Good. Well rounded and competitive in key areas.
★★★★ Very good. Sets some new class standards and misses few.
★★★★⯪ Excellent. Extends several key class standards.
★★★★★ Exceptional, unsurpassed. All but flawless.

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
ABARTH							
500 Esseesse ★★★★☆	25.3.09	Charm on a stick. Raucous and fun.	7.6	6.5	1135	35.8	-
500e Turismo ★★★⯪☆	9.8.23	A stylish and entertaining pint-size EV but pricey and needs refining.	6.9	6.4	1395	-	142
595 Competizione ★★★⯪☆	26.2.14	Great when it's good but tiring when it's bad.	7.5	6.4	1135	39.2	-
ALFA ROMEO							
Giulia Quadrifoglio ★★★★⯪	29.3.17	Everything you would want a fast Alfa Romeo saloon to be. A triumph.	4.5	3.2	1700	35.7	-
Stelvio 2.2D 210 Milano Edizione ★★★⯪☆	3.1.18	Likeable, if short of class's usual refinements.	6.8	7.0	1815	49.7	-
Stelvio Quadrifoglio ★★★⯪☆	9.1.19	A real driver's car, but it stretches SUV-related bounds of acceptability.	4.0	3.3	1931	31.9	-
Stelvio 2.0T 280 Veloce AWD ★★★★☆	28.6.23	Short on premium refinement but meets its discreetly sporty brief well.	5.7	5.3	1784	32.2	-
ALPINE							
A110 Première Edition ★★★★★	16.5.18	Hilarious fun delivered in effusive and accessible fashion.	4.7	3.8	1125	45.6	-
A110 Légende GT ★★★★⯪	9.3.22	The best fast A110 we've seen but not quite the definitive version.	4.8	3.9	1140	40.2	-
A110 R ★★★⯪☆	15.11.23	Hardcore A110 has its lures but probably not enough of them for its price.	4.2	3.5	1094	39.7	-
ARIEL							
Atom 4 ★★★★★	9.10.19	Track-slayer is unrivalled for built-in quality and dynamic character.	3.2	2.4	680	39.2	-
ASTON MARTIN							
Vantage ★★★★⯪	18.9.24	Baby Aston grows up to spectacular effect. A machine of stunning breadth and likeability.	3.5	2.6	1745	28.5	-
DBS Superleggera ★★★★★	21.11.18	Effortlessly fast and intoxicating to drive, the big Aston is better than ever.	3.7	2.7	1910	25.6	-
Vanquish ★★★★⯪	26.3.25	Aston's blown V12 lives on in a devastatingly effective super-GT.	3.1	2.3	1951	25.8	-
DBX 707 ★★★★☆	30.11.22	A better DBX to drive, but still leaves room for improvement.	3.3	2.8	2278	26.2	-
AUDI							
A1 Sportback 35 TFSI S Line Style Edition ★★★⯪☆	2.10.19	Luxury supermini lacks the polish to justify its high price.	7.9	8.4	1209	57.0	-
S3 Sportback ★★★⯪☆	18.11.20	Audi delivers an effective if somewhat unlovable hot hatch.	4.8	4.2	1552	39.0	-
RS3 Sportback Carbon Vorsprung ★★★★☆	9.7.25	Uber-A3 refuses to be defined just by its truly special five-cylinder engine.	3.6	3.3	1619	34.1	-
S5 Launch Edition ★★★★☆	15.1.25	Rounded sports saloon with a characterful V6 and new-found dose of driver appeal.	4.1	3.8	2027	33.7	-
A6 50 TFSIe Quattro S Line ★★★★☆	5.1.22	Hybrid tech boosts saloon's refinement, charm and running credentials.	5.7	5.2	2077	45.4	34
S6 E-tron Avant Launch Edition ★★★⯪☆	16.4.25	Strong technical showing is undermined by price and lack of discernible character.	3.7	2.9	2346	2.8	256
RS6 Avant GT ★★★★☆	5.2.25	Retro visual charm meets unprecedented dynamism in big-hearted estate.	3.2	2.7	2144	26.3	-
A7 Sportback 50 TDI Quattro Sport ★★★⯪☆	11.7.18	Easy on the eye and to live with but let down by stolid dynamics.	5.8	5.3	1880	53.1	-
A8 L 60 TFSIe Quattro Sport ★★★⯪☆	17.6.20	Technically impressive but not as cosseting as a limo ought to be.	-	-	2330	-	-
E-tron 55 Quattro ★★★★⯪	26.6.19	A rounded, uber-luxurious addition to the premium EV niche.	5.4	4.2	2569	-	218
E-tron S Quattro ★★★⯪☆	2.6.21	A slick, tech-laden luxury operator but no dynamic landmark for EVs.	4.2	3.6	2643	-	-
Q2 1.4 TFSI Sport ★★★⯪☆	9.11.16	Fit for purpose but a less compelling option than it might have been.	8.1	8.2	1316	-	-
SQ2 Quattro S Tronic ★★★★☆	20.3.19	More fun than you might expect from a crossover or an Audi S model.	4.5	4.1	1530	34.5	-
Q4 E-tron 40 Sport ★★★⯪☆	7.7.21	Practical, pleasant and efficient but not a superior premium product.	8.1	7.8	2112	-	-
Q5 TDI Quattro 204PS S Line ★★★⯪☆	14.5.25	Pleasant and competitive but no particular step forward.	6.7	7.1	2072	42.6	-
Q6 E-tron Quattro Edition 1 ★★★⯪☆	2.10.24	EV is hard to love, easier to recommend, with good dynamics and strong EV credentials.	5.3	4.3	-	2.8	247
Q7 3.0 TDI Quattro S Line ★★★★☆	12.8.15	Plush, suave and spacious but so-so to drive.	6.2	6.2	2245	-	-
SQ7 4.0 TDI Quattro ★★★★⯪	26.10.16	A class-topping blend of superlative comfort and usable performance.	5.1	4.5	2330	37.9	-
Q8 50 TDI S Line ★★★★☆	26.9.18	Striking and effective SUV-coupé leaves us wanting more.	6.9	6.7	2285	40.1	-
R8 V10 Plus ★★★★☆	30.12.15	Supercar grips and goes even harder but wants for its predecessor's delicacy.	3.1	2.6	1730	-	-
S E-tron GT ★★★★☆	2.4.25	Audi's super-EV holds great appeal in its purest form but isn't at the bleeding edge.	3.1	2.4	2361	2.8	262
BENTLEY							
Bentayga W12 ★★★★⯪	18.5.16	Versatile, genteel, luxurious SUV with a silken sporting edge.	4.9	4.4	2440	-	-
Bentayga EWB Mulliner Blackline ★★★★☆	24.4.24	Stretched SUV lacks the Mulsanne limo's charm but is a better luxury car by far.	4.4	3.8	2600	25.6	-
Continental GT Speed ★★★★☆	22.12.21	Remains a wonderful grand tourer but can fall short as an entertainer.	3.4	2.7	2279	22.0	-
Continental GTC V8 S ★★★★⯪	19.4.23	Sporty V8 execution adds vivacity to a car that makes you feel good.	3.6	3.2	2295	29.1	-
Continental GT Speed Hybrid First Edition ★★★★☆	16.4.25	Electrons make fastest GT quicker but not necessarily better.	3.1	2.5	2462	28.0	47
Flying Spur Hybrid Mulliner ★★★★⯪	17.8.22	Mightily convincing PHEV limo more than earns its Bentley wings.	4.4	3.9	2596	30.1	28

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Flying Spur Speed First Edition	★★★★☆	21.5.25	Hulking V8 hybrid powertrain broadens Spur's remit and skyrockets performance.	3.2	2.7	2750	26.7	44
BMW								
120 M Sport	★★★⯪☆	31.12.24	Credible and complete junior BMW still lacks distinguishing driver appeal.	7.3	6.8	1489	45.8	-
218i M Sport Gran Coupé	★★★☆☆	8.4.20	Junior Gran Coupé hits some high notes but fails to inspire.	8.8	8.4	1375	58.2	-
220i M Sport Coupé	★★★★☆	1.6.22	A good coupé rather than a great sports car.	7.3	7.3	1546	46.8	-
M2 Coupé Manual	★★★★⯪	12.7.23	Junior M car takes huge objective leaps but smaller subjective ones.	4.5	3.8	1687	32.1	-
320d M Sport Auto	★★★★★	15.5.19	BMW's one-time default-choice executive saloon hits even greater heights.	6.9	6.8	1639	63.3	-
330d xDrive M Sport Plus Edition Touring	★★★★⯪	15.1.20	An estate that's powerful, classy and great to drive – but with a price to match.	5.5	5.2	1922	52.6	-
330e M Sport	★★★★⯪	1.7.20	Slicker and sweeter-handling than the average PHEV. A true 3 Series.	-	-	1740	-	-
M440i xDrive	★★★★☆	6.1.21	A rounded, engaging and potent coupé let down only by its looks.	4.1	3.7	1775	44.0	-
M4 Competition	★★★★⯪	21.4.21	A very modern M car and a brilliantly versatile and enjoyable one.	3.9	2.9	1800	32.7	-
M4 CS	★★★★☆	23.4.25	Stunning performance and pace comes with costs that aren't so easy to justify.	2.9	2.5	1747	32.4	-
i4 M50	★★★★☆	19.1.22	Fast, refined and with lots of traditional appeal to convert sceptics.	4.1	3.2	2248	-	186
M4 CSL	★★★★☆	16.11.22	A next-level M car, with the more complex temperament to match.	3.6	2.7	1625	31.1	-
M5	★★★⯪☆	29.1.25	A technical leap, but one born more out of necessity than inspiration.	3.5	2.8	2373	27.3	35
i5 eDrive40 M Sport Pro	★★★⯪☆	29.11.23	Has dynamic appeal but less convincing than BMW's other EV saloons.	5.4	4.4	2213	-	235
550e xDrive M Sport Pro	★★★★☆	3.4.24	Undeniably capable and a fine plug-in hybrid sports saloon.	4.4	3.5	2232	40.1	47
i7 xDrive60 M Sport	★★★★⯪	15.2.23	It has taken huge strides as a luxury car – and still drives like a BMW.	4.5	3.4	2758	-	264
840d xDrive	★★★★☆	16.1.19	A likeable big GT, albeit not the most luxurious or rewarding on sale.	5.0	4.6	1901	49.2	-
M8 Competition Convertible	★★★⯪☆	5.2.20	Has attitude to spare but isn't the complete super-GT.	3.3	2.7	2020	31.6	-
M8 Competition	★★★⯪☆	3.6.20	Highly capable but doesn't truly satisfy as either a sports car or a GT.	-	-	1960	-	-
X1 xDrive23i M Sport	★★★⯪☆	25.1.23	A decent family crossover but a poor BMW.	6.4	6.0	1800	45.6	-
X4 M Competition	★★★☆☆	13.11.19	Fast and precise, if short on the big-time charisma that you would expect.	4.0	3.3	2028	29.0	-
X5 xDrive30d M Sport	★★★★☆	2.1.19	Better to drive than the SUV norm but not better across the board.	6.6	6.6	2279	43.1	-
X6 M Competition	★★★☆☆	20.3.24	Unyielding performance focus makes for a fast but compromised SUV.	3.5	3.1	2442	29.3	-
X7 M60i xDrive	★★★★☆	29.3.23	Uncompromising-looking X7 is seriously fast but laudably refined.	4.2	3.7	2600	28.9	-
iX xDrive60 M Sport	★★★★⯪	9.7.25	Took the luxury EV to new heights in 2022 and nobody has caught up yet. Still great.	4.2	3.3	2637	2.7	314
Z4 M40i with Handschalter Pack	★★★★☆	21.8.24	Manual gearbox gives six-year-old roadster new depth.	5.7	5.9	1561	36.9	-
BMW ALPINA								
B3 GT Touring	★★★★⯪	15.1.25	Last-dance B3 has mighty breadth and will go down as one of the all-time greats.	3.3	2.7	1910	29.4	-
B8 Gran Coupé	★★★★☆	22.9.21	Superbly rounded but lacking some dynamism implied by its looks.	3.5	2.8	2100	-	-
BYD								
Atto 3 Design	★★★☆☆	31.5.23	Lack of attention to detail detracts from the impressive battery tech.	7.0	6.2	1787	-	201
Seal Design	★★★⯪☆	17.1.24	Frustrating software lets down the mostly impressive hardware.	5.8	4.7	2116	-	279
CATERHAM								
Seven 160	★★★★☆	20.11.13	Fun entry-level version of B-road toy smacks just a little of compromise.	8.4	8.7	510	44.8	-
Seven 620S	★★★★⯪	9.3.16	Supplies fun intravenously with a mix of freneticism and road-going usability.	3.8	4.2	650	29.5	-
Seven 420 Cup	★★★★⯪	31.8.22	Track-day variant serves up sensational driving thrills – for a price.	4.2	3.4	560	35.3	-
CHEVROLET								
Corvette 3LT	★★★★☆	22.6.22	Big step up for charismatic, usable and temptingly priced American icon.	3.9	3.2	1679	32.9	-
Corvette Z06 3LZ	★★★★☆	16.8.23	Incredible engine and chassis makeover, but the price has to be right.	3.1	2.4	1670	26.1	-
CITROEN								
Ami Colour	★★⯪☆☆	11.1.23	Cleverly conceived but hard to recommend, given its limited capabilities.	-	-	471	-	39
ë-C3 Max	★★★⯪☆	30.4.25	Predictable limitations but also plenty of usability, space and cheer for the money.	10.7	10.3	1479	2.8	-
C3 Aircross Puretech 110 Flair	★★★⯪☆	7.3.18	Practical small crossover isn't outstanding to drive but is likeable nonetheless.	11.5	10.7	1159	39.5	-
C4 Puretech 130 Shine Plus Auto	★★★☆☆	26.5.21	Has rational and irrational appeal but lacks a fine-tuned execution.	9.5	9.2	1320	56.4	-
ë-C4 X Shine	★★★⯪☆	3.5.23	EV motoring done differently, with value, but its successes are qualified.	9.7	8.8	1623	-	162
C5 Aircross BlueHDi 180 Flair Plus	★★★⯪☆	13.2.19	Attractive and interesting, although its style is better than its substance.	9.0	8.5	1540	47.8	-
C5 X Puretech 180 Shine Plus	★★★★☆	28.9.22	Good value and comfy, this is the kind of car that Citroën should be making.	7.8	7.1	1502	47.8	-
CUPRA								
Born 204PS 58kWh V3	★★★⯪☆	6.7.22	As good as the family hatchback EV class gets in places but not as good as it could be.	6.7	6.2	1794	-	220
Born VZ First Edition	★★★★☆	9.10.24	An already fine electric car's driver appeal is lifted but not transformed.	5.4	4.2	1996	3.5	269
Leon Estate 310PS VZ3	★★★★☆	8.9.21	Fiercely quick and dependable but pulls the heartstrings only lightly.	4.9	4.3	1707	40.1	-
Leon 2.0 TSI 245PS VZ2	★★★★☆	27.7.22	Brilliantly rounded hot hatch shines in its simplest spec.	5.9	4.7	1468	43.4	-
Ateca 2.0 TSI 4Drive DSG	★★★⯪☆	23.1.19	Hot crossover is objectively impressive but lacks true driver reward.	4.9	4.4	1615	36.7	-
Formentor 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2 DSG	★★★★⯪	3.2.21	Versatile, interesting, rewarding. One of the best fast crossovers yet.	5.1	4.3	1583	36.4	-
Terramar 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2	★★★★☆	18.6.25	Hottish cousin of the Volkswagen Tiguan is likeable but a bit too sensible.	5.6	5.1	1737	35.0	-
Tavascan V1	★★★☆☆	5.2.25	Electric SUV is competent but not very compelling or memorable.	6.0	5.0	2129	3.2	246
DACIA								
Sandero Stepway TCe 90 Prestige	★★★★☆	28.4.21	Cut-price crossover is compromised in surprisingly few areas.	11.9	11.9	1096	54.1	-
Jogger TCe 110 Comfort	★★★★⯪	20.4.22	Superb versatility, outstanding value and so likeable with it.	11.0	11.0	1267	48.5	-
Duster Hybrid 140 Journey	★★★★⯪	27.11.24	Notably improved yet barely any pricier.	9.7	8.7	1413	40.2	-
Bigster Hybrid 155 Journey	★★★★☆	11.6.25	Big Duster in name, big Duster in nature.	8.9	7.8	-	47.5	-
DS								
3 Crossback Puretech 155 Prestige	★★★☆☆	10.7.19	No design smash hit. Short on perceived quality and dynamic polish.	8.8	8.3	1205	48.6	-
4 E-Tense 225 Performance Line+	★★★⯪☆	29.6.22	High price and a list of niggles keep this family hatchback away from the top.	7.4	6.0	1706	44.7	26
7 Crossback Puretech 225 Prestige	★★★⯪☆	19.9.18	DS's first SUV is a competent but slightly bland addition to the class.	8.6	7.0	1616	44.6	-
7 E-Tense 4x4 360 La Première	★★★⯪☆	26.4.23	More focused and makes subtle gains, but its powertrain and ride frustrate.	5.7	4.6	1956	36.6	29
9 E-Tense 225 Performance Line Plus	★★★⯪☆	2.2.22	Posh saloon is alternative and devoted to its luxury remit but no show-stopper.	8.6	7.1	1886	44.7	20
FERRARI								
296 GTB	★★★★★	21.12.22	Stellar modern-era Ferrari supercar has an unrivalled breadth of talent.	2.7	1.9	1648	37.8	15
SF90 Stradale	★★★★☆	3.11.21	Sets the performance benchmark but isn't a track-handling great.	2.5	1.8	1698	24.4	16
FIAT								
500 Twinair Lounge	★★★⯪☆	24.11.10	Characterful and stylish, but its real-world economy lets it down.	11.7	13.0	1070	42.1	-
500e 42kWh Icon	★★★★☆	26.1.22	More than just an electric city car and a welcome return to form.	8.1	7.7	1365	-	142
600e La Prima	★★★⯪☆	27.3.24	Electric crossover is decent value and easy to drive but otherwise a bit easy to overlook.	8.8	7.7	1587	-	173

FORD

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Focus 1.5 Ecoboost 182PS ST-Line X	★★★★½	20.2.19	Better to drive and look at than before and impressively good value.	8.9	7.8	1417	43.8	-
Focus ST	★★★★☆	11.9.19	Big on character and performance but not quite truly immersive.	6.1	4.9	1433	40.7	-
Puma 1.0T 125PS MHEV Titanium	★★★★½	25.3.20	The driver's car the compact crossover class has been crying out for and more besides.	10.0	9.6	1260	50.0	-
Puma Gen-E Select	★★★★☆	4.6.25	Ford finally brings engagement to the small EV class.	7.2	7.2	-	3.4	179
Puma ST	★★★★☆	24.3.21	Well judged, versatile and fun. The jacked-up hot hatch done well.	7.2	6.2	1301	41.5	-
Explorer Extended Range Premium RWD	★★★½☆	23.10.24	Electric family crossover is better to drive than rivals, but at a cost.	5.8	4.8	2067	2.9	262
Kuga 2.5 PHEV ST-Line	★★★½☆	24.6.20	Good value and potentially frugal, but this SUV has more to give.	-	-	1844	-	-
Mustang Mach-E Extended Range RWD	★★★★☆	23.6.21	Worthy of the name? Perhaps not, but it's still impressive and likeable.	6.8	5.6	2130	-	-
Mustang Mach-E GT AWD	★★★☆☆	27.4.22	Has its moments but lacks the dynamism of a typical fast Ford.	4.2	3.5	2298	-	-
Mustang Dark Horse	★★★½☆	20.11.24	Brimming with character but more compromised than many of its forebears.	4.5	3.5	1853	26.1	-
Tourneo Courier 1.0 Ecoboost Titanium	★★★½☆	10.7.24	Has some Ford-typical star quality but not enough for the money.	10.8	10.6	1426	47.4	-
Tourneo Connect 1.5 Ecoboost PHEV Titanium	★★★½☆	2.7.25	PHEV power is a smart choice in this versatile, though expensive, utility MPV.	9.7	9.5	1876	40.3	64
Transit Custom L2H1 320 2.0 EcoBlue 150PS Limited	★★★★☆	8.5.24	Likely to remain the default commercial vehicle, despite a high price.	12.1	11.8	1971	38.8	-
Ranger 2.0TD EcoBlue 205PS Wildtrak	★★★★½	14.6.23	Pick-up truck is practical, car-like to drive and generally hard to fault.	9.8	9.9	2348	36.6	-

GENESIS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
G70 2.2 CRDi Luxury Line	★★★½☆	10.11.21	Likeable left-field choice struggles to threaten the establishment.	7.2	6.7	1751	60.4	-
Electrified G80	★★★½☆	12.10.22	Electric limo doesn't quite hit the mark like its Kia and Hyundai platform-mates.	4.4	4.0	2349	-	272
GV60 Sport Plus	★★★★☆	24.8.22	Handsome, fast, sophisticated electric crossover is the best Genesis yet.	3.8	3.1	2192	-	220
GV80 3.0D Luxury 5-Seater	★★★½☆	15.9.21	Rich, spacious and comfortable but not a world-class luxury SUV yet.	6.7	6.6	2217	45.0	-

GWM

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ora Funky Cat 48kWh First Edition	★★½☆☆	1.2.23	Electric hatch is decent value and has funky looks but is a mediocre experience overall.	7.7	7.2	1580	-	154

HONDA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
E Advance	★★★½☆	26.8.20	More than just a pretty face in the EV crowd but its limited range is an issue.	7.9	-	1535	-	110
Jazz 1.5 i-MMD Hybrid EX	★★★½☆	7.10.20	Eminently practical, impressively frugal and pretty joyless to drive.	9.6	10.0	1248	57.0	-
Civic Type R GT	★★★★½	25.10.17	Hot hatch is a sheer delight for enthusiast drivers and their bank balances.	5.7	7.1	1400	57.0	-
HR-V e:HEV Advance Style	★★★½☆	24.11.21	Fine ergonomics and big on superficial charm but leaves us cold.	9.2	9.3	1397	43.2	-
e:Ny1 Advance	★★★☆☆	1.11.23	EV is charming in some ways but has too little substance to justify the price.	8.6	6.9	1756	-	211

HYUNDAI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
i10 1.2 MPi Premium	★★★★☆	15.4.20	Smallest Hyundai regains leadership of the city car class.	12.3	12.9	999	52.5	-
i20 1.0 T-GDi 100 48V SE Connect	★★★½☆	24.2.21	Steady gains for a versatile runabout still lacking some personality.	9.7	10.1	1065	63.5	-
i20 N	★★★★½	25.8.21	N division's finest car to date. A serious hot hatch with real dynamic polish.	6.1	5.4	1231	50.6	-
i30 Tourer 1.4 T-GDi Premium SE	★★★½☆	13.9.17	Competent, servile, inoffensive-looking family estate offers little to like or dislike.	9.5	9.7	1425	48.9	-
Ioniq 6 RWD Ultimate	★★★½☆	7.6.23	Usable, rangy and innovative EV let down by cabin packaging and ride.	7.2	6.2	2006	-	272
Kona 1.0 120PS Advance	★★★★☆	6.9.23	Hyundai brings some cheer, value and space to the compact crossover class.	10.4	10.3	1352	50.4	-
Tucson 1.6 T-GDi Hybrid Premium	★★★★☆	17.3.21	Tucson shows that Hyundai can do both style and substance.	7.6	6.2	1612	47.7	-
Ioniq 5 N	★★★★★	7.8.24	A little big and heavy, but compelling like no other EV to date.	3.5	2.7	2221	-	224
Santa Fe Hybrid 4WD Premium	★★★★☆	16.10.24	A superb lounge on wheels, but let down by its powertrain.	7.9	7.5	2007	32.9	-
Nexo	★★★½☆	12.6.19	Impressive effort that heads in the right direction for hydrogen fuel cell cars.	9.6	9.7	1852	-	-

INEOS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Grenadier 3.0 T Fieldmaster	★★★½☆	20.9.23	Unquestionably a serious proposition but maybe lacking in innovation.	8.0	8.1	2682	20.9	-

JAECOO

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
7 SHS 2WD Luxury	★★½☆☆	9.4.25	Chinese PHEV SUV is efficient and keenly priced but has too many usability flaws.	7.3	6.4	1814	35.0	41

JAGUAR

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
XE 2.0 200PS R-Sport	★★★★½	1.7.15	Junior saloon hits the spot, matching the best of its German rivals at their own game.	7.6	6.7	1530	48.7	-
XF Sportbrake 300PS R-Sport AWD	★★★½☆	17.4.19	Estate is built on enthusiast values but in need of a wider update.	6.6	6.2	1727	36.8	-
E-Pace D180 AWD SE	★★★½☆	11.4.18	Misses the mark for keen drivers but is a desirable SUV nevertheless.	9.9	10.5	1768	49.2	-
I-Pace EV400 S	★★★★½	12.9.18	Jaguar's landmark car strikes a heavy blow to Tesla's luxury EV monopoly.	4.5	3.5	2236	-	-
F-Pace SVR	★★★★½	24.7.19	Broad-batted and can vividly thrill but hasn't forgotten its SUV roots.	4.1	3.5	2070	29.4	-
F-Pace 400e R-Dynamic HSE	★★★★½	1.12.21	Facelift hits the mark. Electrification is a mixed but creditable success.	5.1	4.6	2264	-	24
F-Type P575 R AWD Coupé	★★★★☆	29.4.20	The same likeable bruiser behind those prettier features.	-	-	1743	-	-

JEEP

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Avenger Electric Summit	★★★½☆	24.1.24	Not perfect but successfully takes Jeep in a fresh direction.	8.3	6.9	1601	-	172
Compass 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited	★★★½☆	3.10.18	Pricey, pokey, gruff Jeep is a long shot for SUV market success.	11.0	11.5	1540	44.8	-
Compass 4xe S	★★★☆☆	16.2.22	Not without niche appeal but off the pace in too many respects.	6.4	5.7	1872	46.9	22
Renegade 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited	★★★½☆	28.10.15	Charmingly authentic but also pricey and rather rough and ready.	10.8	11.2	1502	52.6	-
Renegade 4xe Trailhawk	★★★☆☆	30.6.21	Electrified Jeep has some charm but is typically rough and ready.	6.7	5.6	1816	39.4	21
Wrangler 2.2 Multijet II Overland	★★★★☆	10.4.19	Off-road icon is now more competent on it.	9.0	9.1	2122	37.6	-

KGM

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Tivoli XLV ELX Auto	★★★☆☆	14.9.16	Practical, well-priced crossover is competent but far from compelling.	12.0	12.6	1469	-	-
Torres 1.5T K40 AWD	★★½☆☆	4.6.25	Cheerful enough, although not as cheap or capable as we had hoped.	11.3	12.0	1661	35.0	-

KIA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Picanto 1.0 MPI 2	★★★½☆	11.9.24	No great advance for the breed but likeable, capable and still here.	13.4	13.9	985	51.4	-
Ceed 1.6 CRDi 115bhp 2	★★★★☆	29.8.18	Big step up in the family hatchback class is a watershed moment for Kia.	9.9	9.6	1411	70.3	-

TOP 3

BRITAIN'S BEST DRIVER'S CARS

1 McLaren Artura

2 Analogue Supersport

3 Aston Martin Vantage

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

Road tests revisited

2003 VOLKSWAGEN TOUAREG V10

Swaggering Germans fit the most powerful diesel engine yet to their new large SUV, bringing "incomparable pace and flexibility" and incredible refinement. The handling is good too, but doubling the price over the base Touareg makes it difficult to justify.

Price £54,235
Engine V10, 4921cc, twin-turbo, diesel
Power 313bhp at 3750rpm
Torque 553lb ft at 2000rpm
Weight 2524kg
0-60mph 6.7sec
0-100mph 18.9sec
Top speed 142mph
Economy 20.7mpg

1952 LANCIA AURELIA

Revered Italians uphold their reputation for unorthodoxy with a V6, fully independent suspension, a pillarless monocoque and a powertrain clustered at the rear. "A tough, virile car. Exceptionally safe and easy to handle. Obviously going to excite fanatical enthusiasm."

Price £1359 (Italy)
Engine V6, 1991cc, petrol
Power 70bhp at 4500rpm
Torque 94lb ft at 2500rpm
Weight 1343kg
0-30mph 5.9sec
0-60mph 18.0sec
Top speed 92mph
Economy 24.5mpg

READ FULL ROAD TEST FOR FREE*

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Proceed 1.4 T-GDi GT-Line S	★★★½☆	27.2.19	Alluring and interesting but not quite as special to drive as it looks.	9.5	8.9	1475	42.6	-
Xceed 1.4 T-GDi First Edition	★★★½☆	20.11.19	Looks good and drives well yet lacks some practicality and polish.	9.3	8.7	1452	46.8	-
Soul EV Urban	★★★½☆	5.7.23	Not actually that cheap but likeable and complete.	8.0	8.3	1569	-	147
Niro EV 3	★★★★☆	7.9.22	A good family EV made better, despite some missed opportunities.	6.9	5.6	1739	-	246
EV3 81.4kWh GT-Line	★★★★☆	31.12.24	New-era Niro is rationally compelling although it's not a game-changer.	7.2	6.4	1858	2.6	265
Sportage 1.6 HEV 2WD GT-Line S	★★★½☆	15.6.22	Bold family SUV catches the eye but won't hold your interest to drive.	7.3	6.4	1658	44.8	-
EV6 77.4kWh RWD GT-Line S	★★★★☆	9.10.24	Not the outstanding EV it once was yet still a likeably bold choice.	7.5	6.3	-	2.9	227
EV6 GT	★★★½☆	4.10.23	Lots of pace and usability for the money but not enough driver appeal.	3.6	2.7	2161	-	209
Sorento 1.6 HEV T-GDi AWD 2	★★★½☆	20.1.21	Lacks polish, although its abundant utility appeal and value shine through.	8.5	7.9	2006	43.3	-
EV9 GT-Line S	★★★★☆	31.1.24	Style, space, versatility and range for a more reasonable price than rivals.	5.1	4.6	2660	-	220

LAMBORGHINI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Huracán Performante	★★★★½	11.10.17	Breathtaking track makeover brings it close to greatness.	2.9	2.0	1590	22.4	-
Huracán Evo RWD	★★★★½	20.5.20	Finest driver's car Lamborghini makes is also the most attainable.	-	-	1389	-	-
Revuelto	★★★★½	4.12.24	New-era V12 Lamborghini is an extraordinary statement of intent.	2.5	1.7	1960	24.1	6
Urus	★★★★☆	3.7.19	Italy's latest 'mostro' has a driving experience to blow your mind.	3.3	2.8	2285	28.5	-

LAND ROVER

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Range Rover Evoque P300e R-Dynamic HSE	★★★★½	10.2.21	A better plug-in compact SUV. Expensive but slick and luxurious.	6.8	5.9	2158	32.7	24
Discovery Sport D180 AWD SE	★★★★☆	8.1.20	Off-road fidelity and character outweigh a lacklustre powertrain.	10.3	10.5	2145	47.5	-
Discovery TD6 HSE Luxury	★★★★½	12.4.17	A proper Land Rover, modernised, refined and as likeable as ever.	8.7	8.8	2230	-	-
Range Rover Velar D240 HSE	★★★½☆	30.8.17	Stylish, advanced and accomplished but in need of a better powertrain.	9.3	9.0	2089	48.2	-
Defender 110 P400 X	★★★★½	13.5.20	World-class capability. Brilliant on and off road – at a price.	-	-	2388	-	-
Defender 110 P635 Octa Edition 1	★★★★½	30.4.25	Outrageous, unnecessary and totally awe-inspiring.	4.6	3.7	2717	22.1	-
Range Rover Sport D300 Dynamic SE	★★★★½	2.11.22	Deeply appealing and deeply accomplished, with a price to match.	7.2	6.6	2511	42.5	-
Range Rover Sport SV Edition One	★★★½☆	28.8.24	More capable than most rivals, but others are more compelling.	3.9	5.1	2546	28.9	-
Range Rover D350 HSE	★★★★½	13.7.22	A fantastically well-isolated luxury car and fully paid-up capable 4x4.	6.3	6.0	2667	35.9	-
Range Rover P550e Autobiography	★★★★☆	9.4.25	A unique and enthralling character that brings added refinement in PHEV form.	4.9	4.0	2979	26.6	44

LEXUS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
LBX FWD Premium Plus Design	★★★½☆	29.5.24	Crossover convinces as a small premium car, but only just.	8.4	8.4	1306	45.2	-
NX 350h AWD Premium Plus Pack	★★★★☆	16.3.22	Interesting, refined and efficient, although not as polished as the best.	7.1	6.7	1812	44.7	-
RX 500h F Sport	★★★½☆	22.3.23	Classy and luxurious, but that might not be enough for keener drivers.	6.1	5.5	2088	31.7	-
ES 300h Takumi	★★★½☆	6.2.19	Boldly styled, economical saloon has a singularly rational but dry character.	8.7	7.6	1742	48.8	-
RC F Ultimate Edition	★★★½☆	6.11.24	Bellows in some ways, whispers in others. A little flawed but never dull or boring.	4.7	3.8	1733	30.1	-
LM 350h AWD Takumi	★★★☆☆	7.2.24	MPV is a fascinating luxury-market curio but no threat to the old-school limo.	8.6	8.2	2368	40.5	-

LOTUS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Emira V6 First Edition	★★★★½	2.4.25	The British sports car is alive, well and expensive.	4.4	4.0	1493	29.0	-
Emeya 600 GT	★★★★☆	28.5.25	A good electric saloon and a good Lotus.	4.1	2.8	2478	2.4	218
Eletre R	★★★½☆	24.7.24	There's plenty to like about the new Lotus but little sign of the old Lotus.	3.1	2.2	2682	-	216

MASERATI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ghibli Diesel	★★★½☆	12.3.14	Saloon isn't lacking in style but is a little short on substance.	6.5	6.0	2040	40.4	-
Grecale Trofeo	★★★½☆	18.10.23	A belting engine but high-priced and not the best-driving Grecale.	3.6	3.2	2097	33.6	-
Levante Diesel	★★★☆☆	30.11.16	A mildly interesting also-ran, with a weak engine and so-so handling.	6.8	6.9	2205	41.5	-
Levante S Granlusso	★★★½☆	8.5.19	Better engine improves the class's curate's egg but can't redeem it.	5.1	4.5	2232	23.7	-
Granturismo Trofeo	★★★½☆	11.9.24	An appealing grand tourer that lacks some sophistication for the price.	3.6	3.1	-	33.0	-
Granturismo Folgore	★★★½☆	26.2.25	Assured and likeable but could only ever be bought with the heart – even sans V8.	2.9	2.3	2358	2.3	183
MC20 Cielo	★★★★☆	16.10.24	Dynamic iconoclast, old-school charmer, occasional GT. A unique supercar.	4.0	2.8	1783	29.6	-

MAZDA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 1.5 Skyactiv-G 90PS SE-L Nav	★★★★☆	22.4.15	The go-to option for keen drivers is also a convincing all-rounder.	10.4	11.0	1050	-	-
3 2.0 Skyactiv-X 181PS GT Sport	★★★★☆	6.11.19	Sweet to drive and great to behold, but the Skyactiv-X engine is no knockout.	9.1	9.1	1425	57.0	-
MX-30 145PS GT Sport Tech	★★★½☆	10.3.21	Has smart looks and a plush interior, but the first Mazda EV deserved more.	9.1	8.6	1663	-	-
CX-30 2.5 e-Skyactiv G Exclusive-Line	★★★★☆	19.2.25	Alternative powertrain is a credit to this voluble, unconventional compact SUV.	7.6	7.6	1422	45.2	-
CX-5 2.2D 150PS 2WD Sport Nav	★★★★☆	28.6.17	Still moderately left of field but now likeable in greater proportions.	9.4	9.2	1620	53.9	-
CX-60 e-Skyactiv D 3.3 RWD Exclusive-Line	★★★½☆	10.5.23	Old-school in all the best ways, but the ride is difficult to overlook.	7.6	7.2	1893	52.3	-
MX-5 1.5 SE-L Nav	★★★★½	2.9.15	An outstanding and usable sports car at an outstanding price.	8.4	7.9	1050	-	-

McLAREN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
720S	★★★★★	24.5.17	Sufficiently complete and exciting to dominate rivals and hugely fast.	2.9	2.0	1419	24.2	-

*For three weeks from publication date

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
750S	★★★★☆	19.6.24	McLaren's mainstay is a bit of a wild child – at times, to its own cost.	2.9	2.0	1412	28.8	-
Artura	★★★★⯪	19.10.22	Brilliantly packaged, invitingly poised and wise use of electrification.	3.2	2.1	1552	32.9	17
Artura Spider	★★★★⯪	6.11.24	Artura finds extra form in convertible guise.	3.1	2.2	1618	27.2	17
GT	★★★⯪☆	27.1.21	Plenty of pace and purity, less GT-typical usability and refinement.	3.3	2.3	1580	34.2	

MERCEDES-AMG

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A45 S 4Matic+ Plus	★★★★⯪	4.3.20	AMG brings its hottest hatch yet to life without harming usability.	4.1	3.3	1661	41.5	-
C63 S E Performance 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus Estate	★★★☆☆	31.7.24	Fascinating engineering feat falls flat as an exciting super-estate.	3.3	2.8	2217	27.1	7.1
GT 63 4Matic+ 4-Door Coupé	★★★★⯪	13.3.19	AMG defies physics with a four-door GT that handles beautifully.	3.3	2.7	2135	30.1	-
GT 63 S E Performance 4-Door Coupé	★★★⯪☆	21.6.23	Rocket-ship GT with astonishing powertrain but still lacks driver reward.	2.9	2.5	2339	23.9	6
EQS 53 4Matic+ Night Edition	★★★★☆	8.6.22	Good but doesn't quite live up to its spectacular on-paper potential.	3.6	2.8	2673	-	259
S63 E Performance Night Edition	★★★★☆	2.10.24	Prodigiously quick, confoundingly slick in its handling, but has a coarseness to it.	3.5	2.7	2666	26.1	-
GLE 53 4Matic+ Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	14.10.20	Remarkable dynamic versatility but lacks some driver appeal.	5.4	4.9	2471	29.4	-
SL 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	26.7.23	Stonking V8 doesn't quite redeem a car of as many sacrifices as gains.	3.5	2.8	1939	26.2	-
GT 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus Coupé	★★★⯪☆	14.8.24	Fearsomely quick and truly usable but less lovable than before.	3.1	2.7	1972	30.7	-

MERCEDES-BENZ

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A200 AMG Line Executive	★★★★☆	24.5.23	Significant progress for a keen-handling and efficient premium hatch.	7.8	7.3	1396	59.3	-
A250e AMG Line Premium	★★★☆☆	5.8.20	Falls some way short of a rounded 'premium' driving experience.	6.7	5.4	1665	57.8	-
B180 Sport	★★★★☆	3.4.19	In an ever-shrinking niche, this compact MPV deserves consideration.	8.4	8.3	1405	51.3	-
CLA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★☆☆	21.8.19	Nearer the mark to look at but still way wide of it as a driver's car.	6.8	6.1	1555	48.3	-
C300e AMG Line	★★★★⯪	4.5.22	Long-range hybrid tech gives C-Class an outstanding selling point.	5.8	5.1	2005	49.0	48
E220d AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★★☆	3.1.24	An effective blend of convention, comfort, luxury and modernity.	7.2	5.9	1917	65.8	-
E450d Estate Exclusive Premium Plus	★★★★⯪	19.3.25	Big-hearted diesel has speed, space and opulence. The only car you would ever need.	4.9	4.3	2167	46.1	-
EQE 350+ AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	4.1.23	Hot on comfort and tech but lacklustre on range, material quality and space.	6.0	5.5	2386	-	262
EQS 450+ Business Class	★★★★☆	7.5.25	Progress has been made, but this limousine still isn't quite the ultimate luxury EV.	5.9	4.9	2608	2.6	248
EQS 450 Business Class SUV	★★★⯪☆	6.3.24	Ultra-luxurious seven-seater strays confusingly into MPV territory.	5.5	5.2	2899	-	265
S580e L AMG Line Premium Plus Executive	★★★★⯪	6.4.22	Plug-in S-Class is the best of an otherwise ordinary generation.	5.2	4.2	2530	37.0	45
EQA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★☆☆	17.11.21	Competent but entirely average. For the money, we expect better.	8.4	7.6	2030	-	200
GLB 220d 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★⯪☆	16.9.20	Smart looking and practical but its identity feels stretched at times.	7.4	7.1	1810	55.4	-
EQB 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★⯪☆	18.5.22	A versatile premium EV that doesn't easily command its premium.	7.7	6.8	2235	-	-
GLC 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	13.9.23	Shines in places but doesn't notably elevate the GLC proposition.	6.5	6.0	1929	41.2	-
GLS 400d 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★⯪☆	12.2.20	Has much to commend it but not enough to be the S-Class of SUVs.	6.5	6.0	2634	38.2	-
G350d AMG Line	★★★★☆	17.7.19	Customary capability, charm and ego, now with 21st-century luxury.	7.5	7.2	2451	31.3	-
G500 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★★☆	25.9.24	Anachronistic, iconoclastic and expensive but very hard not to love.	5.1	4.5	-	30.7	-
CLE 300e AMG Line Premium Plus Coupé	★★★★☆	13.11.24	Electrification brings traditional Merc strengths to a desirable mid-sized coupé.	6.1	5.5	2122	37.1	49

MG

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3 Hybrid+ Trophy	★★★⯪☆	12.6.24	Good value and with no serious vices but still lacks a final layer of polish.	6.8	6.2	1311	47.9	-
4 EV Long Range SE	★★★★☆	5.4.23	Good value, useful and fun to drive to boot.	7.1	6.1	1692	-	185
5 SW EV Exclusive	★★★⯪☆	25.11.20	MG's second EV does cheap motoring much better than the first.	8.0	7.1	1538	-	161
ZS Hybrid+ Trophy	★★★☆☆	22.1.25	Roomier, cleverer and better-equipped than you would expect for the money.	7.6	6.6	1422	41.5	-

MINI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
John Cooper Works	★★★★☆	14.5.25	A proper hot hatch let down by a stiff ride and an impenetrable user interface.	5.8	4.5	1363	42.0	-
Countryman C Exclusive	★★★⯪☆	17.4.24	Spacious but sends mixed messages on family-friendly refinement.	8.7	7.7	1618	46.9	-
Aceman SE Exclusive	★★★⯪☆	8.1.25	Compact SUV has the usual Mini charm but limited extra grown-up appeal.	6.8	5.7	1756	3.1	162

MORGAN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Plus Four	★★★⯪☆	12.8.20	Refreshing and fun in that true Morgan way but lacks a little polish.	5.1	4.3	1013	54.0	-
Plus Six	★★★★☆	10.4.24	The individualist's sports car made better.	4.4	3.3	1188	37.2	-
Super 3	★★★★⯪	9.11.22	Adds some subtle modernity to the 3 Wheeler's endless giggles.	6.9	5.9	644	43.5	-

NISSAN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Juke 1.0 DIG-T 117 Tekna	★★★⯪☆	29.1.20	Impressive in some respects but outstanding in few.	11.9	11.8	1256	46.0	-
Qashqai 1.3 DIG-T 158 Tekna	★★★★☆	28.7.21	Ticks the important family car boxes but its powertrain frustrates.	10.0	9.3	1412	44.9	-
Ariya 87kWh Evolve	★★★⯪☆	26.10.22	Surprisingly traditional and luxurious although not wholly successful.	8.2	6.4	2109	-	-
X-Trail e-Power e-4orce AWD Tekna	★★★★☆	22.2.23	Capable all-rounder that deals effortlessly with everyday life.	6.6	6.0	1947	33.8	-

OMODA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
5 1.6 TGDI Comfort	★★⯪☆☆	20.11.24	Chinese SUV has some promise as a purely rational buy but feels under-developed.	7.4	6.3	1474	38.2	-

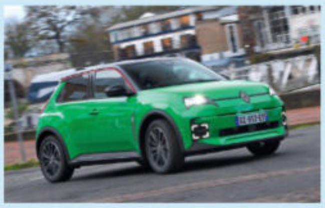
PEUGEOT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
e-208 Allure Premium	★★★★☆	6.5.20	Stylish, drivable, usable, reasonably priced – and the best small EV	-	-	1455	38.2	-
308 1.2T Puretech 130 GT	★★★★☆	25.5.22	A reminder of the old Peugeot magic. Small, supple and a bit special.	9.5	9.2	1358	55.3	-
408 Hybrid 180 GT e-EAT8	★★★★☆	11.10.23	Novel Peugeot shows an alternative path for the family car.	8.2	7.3	1746	42.1	40
508 BlueHDi 180 S&S GT Auto	★★★★☆	24.10.18	Stylish and likeable but lacking the polish of more premium rivals.	8.8	8.5	1671	52.0	-
508 SW Hybrid 225 S&S Allure e-EAT8	★★★★☆	8.7.20	This is a comfortable car that looks smart and feels classy.	-	-	1720	-	-
508 SW Hybrid4 PSE	★★★★☆	5.5.21	Hits notable handling highs but feels less than sharp elsewhere.	5.7	4.7	1892	44.0	-

TOP 3

BEST SMALL CARS

1 Fiat Grande Panda



2 Renault 5

3 Renault Clio

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
e-2008 GT Line ★★★½☆ 30.9.20 Cheaper versions impress; pricier ones won't worry class leaders.	9.5	8.9	1638	-	-
3008 1.6 BlueHDi 120 GT Line ★★★½☆ 18.1.17 In challenging company, the 3008 promises more than it delivers.	12.0	12.1	1300	53.2	-
e-3008 73kWh Allure ★★★½☆ 4.8.24 Electric family SUV is rich, handsome and refined but no technical tour de force.	8.5	7.1	2132	-	219
5008 Hybrid 136 GT ★★★☆☆ 12.2.25 Concept car style can't save the function-follows-form engineering.	9.9	9.4	1736	44.0	-

POLESTAR

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 BST Edition 270 ★★★½☆ 12.4.23 A creditable attempt at electric car thrills, although not quite fully formed.	4.5	3.4	2161	-	188
3 Long Range Dual Motor Launch Edition ★★★★☆ 12.2.25 Electric SUV is spacious, attractive and enticing to drive - with a few lapses.	4.6	3.8	2610	2.3	235

PORSCHE

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
718 Boxster ★★★★½ 8.6.16 Better than ever objectively, but at the expense of vital subjective appeal.	5.4	4.3	1395	35.9	-
718 Cayman S ★★★★½ 10.8.16 Still the greatest sports coupé out there, even if it doesn't sound like it.	4.8	3.9	1430	-	-
718 Spyder ★★★★½ 1.4.20 Spyder's flat six rectifies most, if not quite all, of the 718's shortcomings.	4.3	3.5	1350	30.1	-
718 Cayman GT4 RS ★★★★★ 14.9.22 A feast of noise, revs, handling poise and thrills. Incredibly special.	3.9	3.0	1444	27.1	-
911 GT3 PDK ★★★★½ 11.8.21 Less versatile than some past GT3s but still spectacularly good.	3.4	2.7	1430	29.2	-
911 Turbo S ★★★★½ 10.8.22 Has a questionable raison d'être but is engaging and awesomely capable.	2.5	2.0	1640	36.3	-
911 Carrera T ★★★★☆ 30.8.23 Sharper 911 has a likeable simplicity but makes key compromises.	4.9	3.8	1456	39.1	-
911 GT3 RS ★★★★½ 22.11.23 Esoteric even by hardcore 911 standards but simply monumental.	3.2	2.5	1476	26.7	-
911 Dakar ★★★★☆ 10.1.24 Rally-raid-themed throwback charms like no other modern 911.	3.3	2.6	1660	36.0	-
911 S/T ★★★★★ 3.7.24 Porsche's GT division alters its recipe to deliver an all-time great.	3.7	2.6	1408	30.9	-
911 Carrera GTS ★★★★½ 5.3.25 Hybrid tech punts barnstorming Carrera into the supercar sphere.	2.8	2.6	1607	34.3	-
Macan Turbo ★★★★½ 4.6.14 Luxury SUV meets sports car in a compact, well-priced package.	4.7	4.3	2050	30.9	-
Macan Turbo Electric ★★★½☆ 19.2.25 Otherwise appealing EV is undone by chassis tech.	3.0	2.5	-	2.1	219
Cayenne S ★★★★½ 21.2.24 Rebooted Cayenne impresses and the charming V8 is our pick.	5.0	4.3	2256	28.8	-
Cayenne Turbo ★★★★☆ 5.9.18 As impressive as ever but not quite the driver's car it once was.	3.9	3.4	2307	31.5	-
Cayenne Turbo S E-Hybrid ★★★½☆ 27.5.20 Technically impressive but fails to make a convincing case for itself.	-	-	2490	-	-
Cayenne Turbo GT Coupé ★★★★☆ 20.7.22 Uncompromising rapid SUV is a bit of a monster – but a likeable one.	3.1	2.7	2251	26.1	-
Panamera 4 E-Hybrid ★★★★☆ 22.1.25 Understated plug-in hybrid is a Swiss Army knife super-saloon.	3.8	2.4	2370	30.1	29
Taycan Turbo S ★★★★½ 30.10.24 Porsche deftly keeps its superb EV on the boil.	2.6	1.9	2356	2.7	233

TOP 3

BEST HYBRID CARS

1 Volkswagen Golf eHybrid

2 Toyota Corolla

3 Volvo V60 T6

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

RENAULT

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Clio TCe 100 Iconic ★★★★½ 27.11.19 Plusher, smoother, more mature. A car of substance as well as style.	11.6	10.9	1138	56.9	-
5 E-Tech Comfort Range Iconic Five ★★★★½ 12.3.25 Accomplished and well priced, the 5 changes the affordable EV game.	7.7	7.2	1461	3.1	166
Megane E-Tech Techno ★★★½☆ 23.11.22 Likeable and eye-catching, but rivals have moved the EV game on.	6.9	5.4	1688	-	198
Captur TCe 130 S-Edition EDC ★★★½☆ 18.3.20 Second-generation Captur should prove popular, but not with this powertrain.	9.4	9.2	1363	53.1	-
Arkana E-Tech Hybrid 145 S-Edition ★★★½☆ 13.10.21 Eminently sensible but unspectacular.	11.0	10.1	1365	58.3	-
Scenic E-Tech Iconic Long Range ★★★★☆ 26.6.24 The Scenic finally conforms but does so with style and substance.	8.1	6.3	1916	-	313
Austral E-Tech Iconic Esprit Alpine ★★★½☆ 19.7.23 Clever hybrid and pleasant cabin but let down by clumsy dynamics.	8.5	6.9	1696	43.5	-

ROLLS-ROYCE

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ghost Series II Black Badge ★★★★½ 25.6.25 Only flirts with sporting appeal, and gives up no Rolls accomplishments in doing so.	4.5	3.6	2576	25.8	-
Phantom ★★★★★ 4.4.18 The world's greatest and finest luxury car is now also the very best.	5.5	4.4	2780	28.4	-
Spectre ★★★★½ 20.12.23 Superbly lavish and intoxicatingly refined, if shy of epoch-making.	4.1	3.1	2935	-	245
Cullinan Black Badge ★★★★☆ 19.2.20 Far more likeable to drive than look at, for those who have a use for it.	4.9	4.2	2739	23.6	-

SEAT

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ibiza 1.0 TSI SE Technology ★★★★½ 19.7.17 Grown-up supermini shows its rivals how it's done – in most respects.	10.0	10.0	1047	55.6	-
Leon eHybrid FR ★★★½☆ 2.12.20 Competent and efficient but verges on being forgettable to drive.	7.2	6.2	1558	46.3	26
Arona 1.0 TSI SE Technology ★★★★☆ 15.11.17 Polished, mature all-rounder has since lost its class-best crown.	10.5	10.7	1149	40.9	-
Ateca 1.5 Eco TSI FR Black Edition DSG ★★★☆☆ 25.10.23 Once-appealing Nissan Qashqai rival now shows some signs of neglect.	8.9	8.0	1396	44.4	-

SKODA

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Fabia 1.0 TSI 95PS SE Comfort ★★★★½ 9.2.22 Comfy, spacious and good value, this supermini is Skoda at its best.	9.9	9.7	1117	58.7	-
Scala SE 1.5 TSI 150PS DSG ★★★½☆ 31.7.19 Different from the bigger Octavia but perhaps not by enough.	7.9	7.3	1200	52.9	-
Octavia 2.0 TDI 150PS SE L First Edition Estate DSG ★★★★☆ 2.9.20 Leads the charge to take Skoda upmarket and mostly succeeds.	8.4	8.7	1510	73.0	-
Octavia Estate vRS ★★★★☆ 29.1.25 A fine estate made more engaging rather than a great hot hatch made a bit bigger.	5.9	4.8	-	37.6	-
Superb SE L 2.0 TDI 150PS Estate ★★★★★ 17.7.24 The large, functional estate car modernised in all the right ways.	8.4	8.2	1673	68.7	-
Karoq 2.0 TDI 150PS Scout ★★★½☆ 30.1.19 Practical, comfortable Skoda is short on charm and dynamic polish.	8.9	9.6	1629	47.1	-
Elroq 85 Edition ★★★★½ 19.3.25 Comfortable, efficient, practical and intuitive; a well-rounded, class-topping EV.	6.1	5.0	2085	3.5	246
Enyaq iV 80 Lounge ★★★★☆ 18.8.21 Practical, rangy, well priced. Hits a sweet spot in the EV market.	8.3	7.8	2098	-	262

SMART

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
#1 Premium ★★★½☆ 8.11.23 Drivability frustrations mar an otherwise agreeable experience.	5.6	4.6	1861	-	229
#3 Premium ★★★½☆ 15.5.24 Makings of an interesting alternative EV but let down by the finer details.	5.7	4.9	1832	-	205

SUBARU

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Crosstrek 2.0i e-Boxer Touring ★★★½☆ 28.2.24 Improved manners for junior off-roader are welcome, if not transformative.	10.4	10.4	1620	45.3	-
Outback 2.5i Lineartronic Touring ★★★½☆ 27.9.23 A pretty good answer to a question that only a few people asked.	9.3	8.7	1690	42.8	-
Solterra AWD Touring ★★★☆☆ 15.3.23 A hint of Subaru-typical capability doesn't take this EV quite far enough.	6.7	6.2	2051	-	169

SUZUKI

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Across 2.5 PHEV E-Four CVT ★★★★½ 7.4.21 Excellent hybrid powertrain makes it one of the best PHEVs around.	6.4	5.8	1966	44.4	48

TESLA

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Model 3 Standard Range Plus ★★★★☆ 4.9.19 Wrinkles aside, it offers great electric performance and usability at this price.	5.8	4.7	1633	-	156

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Model 3 Long Range	★★★★☆	14.2.24	Packs a real punch. Both updated Model 3s are fine propositions.	4.4	3.4	1846	-	277
Model Y Long Range AWD	★★★★☆	23.3.22	A far better electric car than a premium SUV.	4.7	3.6	1978	-	234
Model S P90D	★★★★½	20.4.16	Great EV, intriguing driver's car. Not quite the perfect luxury GT.	3.5	3.0	2220	-	214
Model S Plaid	★★★½☆	2.8.23	Astonishing pace but not a fully rounded performance saloon.	2.4	1.7	2220	-	301
Model X 90D	★★★★☆	15.2.17	High-rise EV strains under SUV brief but still feels like a history maker.	5.2	4.2	2508	-	147
TOYOTA								
Aygo X Limited Edition	★★★½☆	11.5.22	A mostly very grown-up small car but also an expensive one.	15.6	16.5	974	58.7	-
Yaris 1.5 Hybrid Design	★★★★☆	23.9.20	Grows not only in stature but also in ability and subjective appeal.	9.2	8.8	1140	65.0	-
GR Yaris Circuit Pack	★★★★★	3.3.21	Toyota, on a roll with driver's cars, provides yet another winner.	5.2	5.0	1283	39.2	-
Corolla 2.0 Hybrid Design Touring Sports	★★★★☆	5.6.19	A big step up for Toyota in a vital sector and a better hybrid to boot.	8.5	7.7	1537	52.6	-
Prius Plug-in Design	★★★★☆	23.4.25	Better late than never for best Prius to date.	6.6	5.6	1542	56.1	46
bZ4X AWD Vision	★★★½☆	18.1.23	A decent effort all round but not exceptional in any way.	6.4	5.9	2023	-	208
Land Cruiser 2.8 D-4D 204 Invincible	★★★★☆	21.5.25	Remains supremely tough but now has added kerb appeal and drivability.	10.3	10.3	2503	30.7	-
Mirai Design Premium	★★★★☆	16.6.21	Impressive hydrogen fuel cell car has made strides but remains hamstrung overall.	8.7	8.3	1937	-	-
GR Supra Pro	★★★★☆	14.8.19	Fast, usable and has plenty going for it but leaves us wanting more.	4.4	3.6	1495	39.0	-
Hilux 2.8 D-4D GR Sport	★★★½☆	1.3.23	Gazoo-branded Ford Ranger Raptor rival is formidable but lacks fun factor.	10.0	9.5	2241	32.5	-
VAUXHALL								
Corsa 1.2 Turbo 100PS Ultimate Nav Auto	★★★½☆	22.1.20	Supermini is improved in many ways but lacks the appeal to match its price.	11.2	11.5	1171	51.8	-
Astra 1.2 Turbo 130PS GS Line	★★★½☆	5.10.22	Family hatchback's gentle push upmarket is only a qualified success.	9.9	9.2	1304	55.3	-
Crossland X 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite	★★★☆☆	7.6.17	Typically practical and well priced, but Vauxhall can do better.	9.8	10.3	1278	54.2	-
Mokka 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite Nav Premium Auto	★★★½☆	12.5.21	The driving experience sells a brave design effort just a little short.	9.3	9.1	1238	48.6	-
Grandland X Hybrid4 Ultimate Nav	★★★☆☆	22.4.20	Inspires big expectations and delivers few, but it's an interesting fleet option.	-	-	1800	-	-
Combo Life 1.5 Turbo D 100PS Energy	★★★½☆	27.12.18	Usable, spacious and practical, if not very pretty to look at.	14.7	16.2	1552	60.1	-
VOLKSWAGEN								
Polo 1.0 TSI 95PS SE	★★★★½	31.1.18	Brings 'big car' space, class, kit and finish to this class like never before.	10.7	11.2	1145	57.1	-
Polo 2.0 TSI GTI+	★★★★☆	1.8.18	A usable, quick and vastly competent effort but not the most thrilling.	6.7	5.9	1342	46.8	-
Golf 1.5 eTSI 150PS Style DSG	★★★★½	22.7.20	Additional strengths and familiar ones carry it back to the class lead.	8.3	7.8	1330	60.0	-
Golf 1.5 TSI eHybrid Style	★★★★½	23.10.24	New plug-in Golf takes the PHEV hatchback's status to greater heights.	7.2	6.1	1619	46.5	-
Golf GTI	★★★½☆	25.9.24	'Mk8.5' version of hot hatchback is slick and effective but not a big enough step forward.	5.3	4.4	-	47.2	-
Golf R	★★★★☆	14.4.21	Most entertaining distillation of the Golf R formula yet – for a price.	4.4	3.7	1520	43.9	-
ID 3 Pro Performance Life	★★★★☆	31.3.21	Bland but with the substance to further the zero-emissions push.	7.0	6.5	1757	-	145
Arteon 2.0 BiTDI 240PS 4Motion R-Line	★★★½☆	27.9.17	Considered approach produces an executive flagship short on sparkle.	6.5	6.2	1866	55.6	-
Arteon eHybrid Elegance Shooting Brake	★★★½☆	9.6.21	Striking PHEV appears radical but upholds Volkswagen's traditions at heart.	7.1	6.0	1783	52.5	-
ID 7 Pro Match	★★★★½	13.3.24	Volkswagen finds some electric form in an unexpected format.	6.1	5.1	2162	-	239
T-Roc 2.0 TSI 190PS 4Motion SEL DSG	★★★★½	24.1.18	Shows performance verve, dynamic completeness and stylish swagger.	6.7	6.5	1534	37.5	-
T-Roc 1.5 TSI Evo R-Line Cabriolet DSG	★★½☆☆	10.6.20	It brings little worth having to the compact cabriolet niche.	-	-	1540	-	-
Tiguan 1.5 eTSI 150PS R-Line	★★★½☆	22.5.24	Functional and mature, but this isn't the engine or trim we would go for.	9.4	9.2	1606	44.9	-
ID 4 GTX Max	★★★½☆	27.10.21	GTX adds flavour to ID 4 but doesn't reimagine 'GTI' for the EV age.	6.2	5.6	2220	-	200
Touareg 3.0 TDI 4Motion R-Line Tech	★★★½☆	8.8.18	An inoffensive if forgettable bid at a luxury market breakthrough.	7.2	6.6	2292	41.6	-
Touareg 3.0 TSI eHybrid 4Motion Elegance	★★★½☆	5.6.24	It's versatile and likeably unpretentious but won't be a default company car choice.	6.2	5.7	2446	34.1	26
Touran 2.0 TDI 150PS SE Family DSG	★★★★☆	3.2.16	A spacious, refined and classy all-rounder – albeit a slightly bland one.	9.9	9.7	1666	-	-
Multivan 1.4 eHybrid Style	★★★★☆	8.3.23	Latest Volkswagen 'bus combines the best bits of both car and van.	8.4	7.1	2243	37.9	14
ID Buzz 77kWh Style Pro	★★★★☆	8.2.23	It costs plenty but offers versatility and luxury accomplishments.	9.5	9.1	2498	-	185
Grand California 600	★★★½☆	2.1.20	Grandest California is classy but not half as clever as its smaller namesake.	15.8	16.7	3095	28.5	-
Transporter Sportline Black Edition Kombi SWB	★★★☆☆	30.3.22	Not compromised but hardly enhanced by its sporting agenda.	9.1	9.0	2108	39.1	-
Passat eHybrid 204PS Elegance	★★★★☆	13.11.24	Rounded and with good PHEV credentials, but less compelling than its sibling car.	7.2	6.4	1836	44.5	73
VOLVO								
EX30 Single Motor Extended Range Plus	★★★☆☆	1.5.24	Not enough key strengths – and not enough Volvo pragmatism.	5.7	5.1	1779	-	179
C40 Recharge Twin Ultimate	★★★½☆	13.4.22	A transitional model for Volvo that doesn't go quite far enough.	4.4	3.6	2172	-	194
XC40 D4 AWD First Edition	★★★★½	7.2.18	Wieldy, classy and simple. As good as its bigger siblings, if not better.	8.5	8.5	1735	43.8	-
XC60 D4 AWD R-Design	★★★½☆	5.7.17	The right product at the right time but lacking the right dynamic finish.	8.9	8.9	1836	48.9	-
XC90 B5 AWD Ultra Bright	★★★½☆	2.7.25	Still a mature, versatile and wilfully unspectacular choice.	8.0	7.5	2117	37.0	-
V60 D4 Momentum Pro Auto	★★★★☆	27.6.18	Fine-looking, capable and practical estate with only a few demerits.	8.9	8.3	1669	43.1	-
V60 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★½	21.9.22	Strong hybrid system gives ageing Volvo a lot of fresh appeal.	4.9	4.3	2036	38.0	51
V90 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★½	11.11.20	Hardly revolutionary but exceptionally appealing nonetheless.	5.6	4.9	2109	41.9	-
XPENG								
G6 RWD Standard Range	★★★½☆	26.2.25	Chinese electric SUV lacks inspiration but has plenty of rational appeal.	6.8	6.2	2067	3.3	208

WHAT'S COMING WHEN

Aston Martin Valhalla October
Long-awaited 1064bhp V8 PHEV supercar will make its UK dynamic debut at Goodwood.

LEVC L380 December
Four-row electric MPV is inspired by the first class section of long-haul flights.

Hyundai Ioniq 6 October
Update for Tesla Model 3 rival includes a bigger battery and a refreshed design.

SCAN THE CODE FOR THE FULL LIST

Why I love...
THE FORD EDSEL STORY

BY TOM EVANS

Unsuccessful cars can sometimes be much more interesting than slam-dunk winners. Give me a Leyland P76 over, say, the Mk1 Volkswagen Golf, launched around the same time.

It's not just the vicarious interest of witnessing a metaphorical car crash that captivates me – it's also the story behind it. No company sets out to make a turkey, but the way it was baked, nonetheless, is nearly always fascinating and often instructive. Also, I feel sorry for the people who find themselves in the middle of the mess. There but for the grace of God...

The size of most automotive investments means that blow-ups are not only expensive but also often high-profile. Ford's Edsel adventure is one of the car industry's most infamous foul-ups: launched in 1957, it was axed just 26 months later. But the seeds of the story go back decades, and that's another aspect of automotive disasters I like: they sometimes occur over very long periods and for enigmatic reasons.

Henry Ford did much to create the modern car industry, but he had all the arrogance that being the world's richest man can buy you (newer arrogant billionaires are available). He loved his Model T just too much; revolutionary when new in 1908, it was getting obsolete by the 1920s, and he wasn't persuaded to replace it until 1927.

Meanwhile, across town, Alfred Sloan at General Motors was treating the car business just like the then embryonic consumer goods industry: a world of multiple brands, demographic targets and price points. Moreover, he injected planned obsolescence, with model-year tweaks to juice demand. GM overtook Ford in 1927, and it's a lead it holds in the US market to this day, nearly 100 years on.

The Mustang saved Ford's bacon as the world's fastest-selling car ever

Ford's bold Edsel dream failed to materialise, not helped by a recession

> **"The design was divisive and quality control was poor"**

Ford had Lincoln, but there was a massive gulf between that luxury offshoot and the blue-collar T. So when motorists grew a little older and a little richer, Ford had nothing to offer them – but Sloan did, with his successful mid-range marques such as Buick and Oldsmobile. Belatedly, Ford realised it was just making customers for GM as they traded up.

Ford eventually responded in 1938 with the Mercury brand, but it never really cut the mustard, and in any case war arrived soon after to curtail car production for several years. When the company was back on an even keel in the 1950s, Ford decided that it had to do something for the mid-market once again in order to take on General Motors (and its successful Pontiac, especially), and it created Edsel.

It was a bold plan: a new brand and vehicle line-up, new production lines and 1200 new dealers recruited to sell it across America. But the design of the new cars was divisive, early quality control was poor and there was the little matter of a horrendous recession that saw new car sales drop by half, which was deadly for a new kid on the block.

But this cataclysmic cloud had a silver lining (as many tend to): the Edsel is not as well known as it should be, and all that new production capacity came in very handy just a few years later when Ford was deluged with orders for its new Mustang – which then very quickly smoothed over its forebear's troubled legacy by becoming the world's fastest-selling car in history. What's a few broken eggs when you end up with that kind of omelette?

What we did this week

CZECH YOUR SAUCES

You would never expect someone with the professional background of Klaus Zellmer, a long-term Porsche executive and now Skoda CEO, to have even heard of brown sauce, let alone enjoy this British breakfast staple. But as a student he spent a year in Swansea living with a cat-loving landlady and made sure he was "fully immersed with British culture" – HP included. Our interview was over breakfast, in case you were wondering... **MARK TISSHAW**

Frère sighting

I embarrassed my partner with a gasp of delighted incredulity when I saw that our Renault 5 long-termer had been joined by a Renaultsport Twingo in Sainsbury's car park. Leaving aside the stark size disparity, these two are pretty well matched for performance and panache, and I'd be happy with either as a fun daily driver. I reckon the 5's tipped for similar modern classic status, too. **FELIX PAGE**

Vorsprung durch knacken

The Audi Forum restaurant at the firm's Ingolstadt HQ plays to its reputation for well-engineered tech, with serviettes featuring cutaway diagrams and detailed instructions for crucial culinary techniques such as, er, cracking walnuts. No word yet on RS-branded nuts that can be cracked in significantly less time – and much more noisily. **JAMES ATTWOOD**

Walnüsse knacken

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Pumped-up hot hatch tops
Why this is the new Fiesta
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The crazy supercar that's 3D-printed
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SEAT LEON
Estate e-HYBRID
S26 BCN
No Ordinary Drive

Official fuel consumption for the SEAT Leon Estate range mpg (litres/100km) combined: 48.7 (5.8) – 706.2 (0.4). Combined CO_2 emissions 132 – 8 (g/km). Figures for the SEAT Leon Estate range, including petrol/diesel and hybrid vehicles. Figures for hybrid vehicles were obtained using a combination of battery power and fuel. Figures shown are for comparability purposes; only compare fuel consumption, CO_2 and electric range figures with other vehicles tested to the same technical procedures. These figures may not reflect real life driving results, which will depend upon a number of factors including the accessories fitted (post-registration), variations in weather, driving styles and vehicle load. Data correct at 06/2025.